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A Dame to Kill For **FRANK MILLER**

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FRANK MILLER'S SIN CITY® VOLUME 2: A DAME TO KILL FOR
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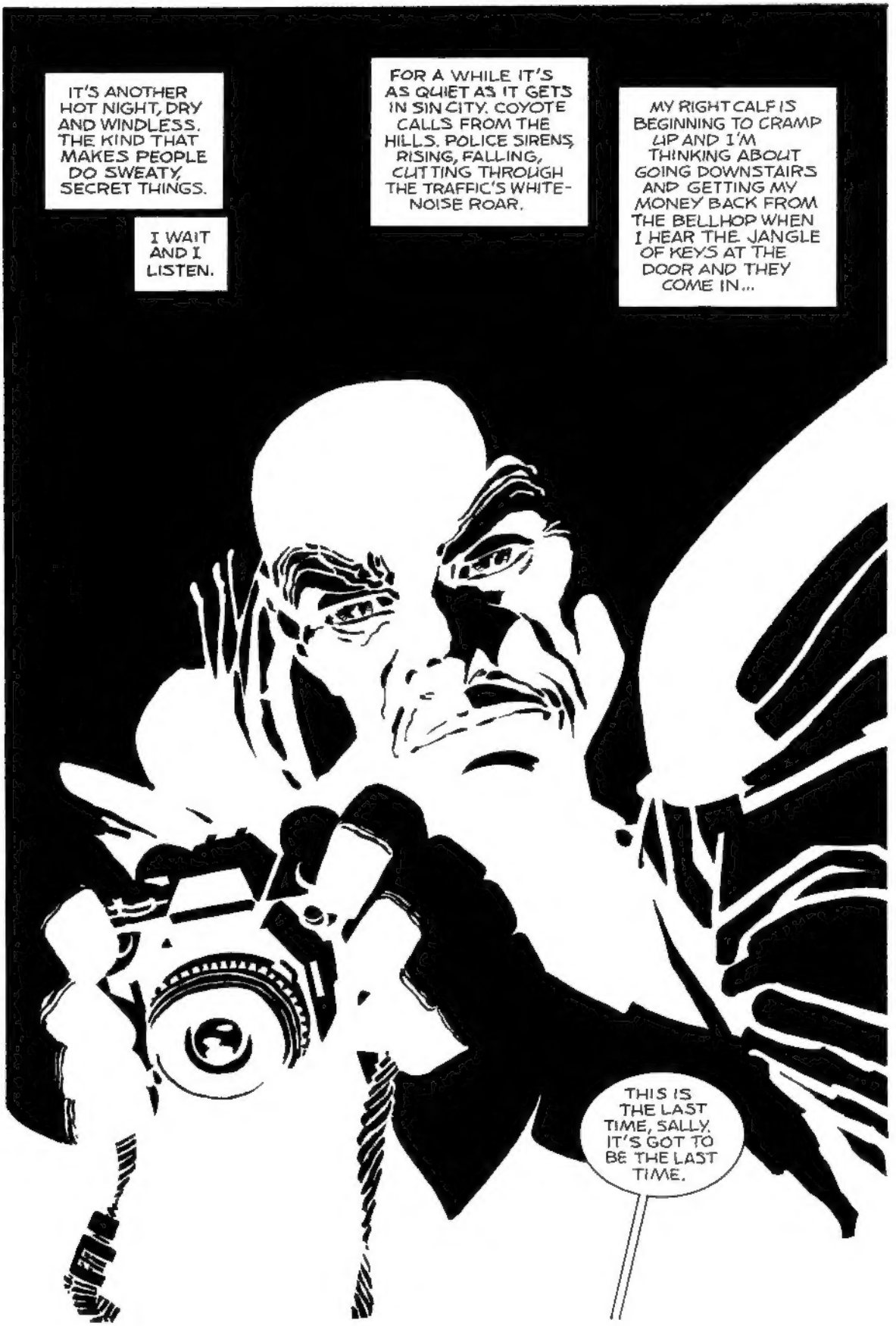
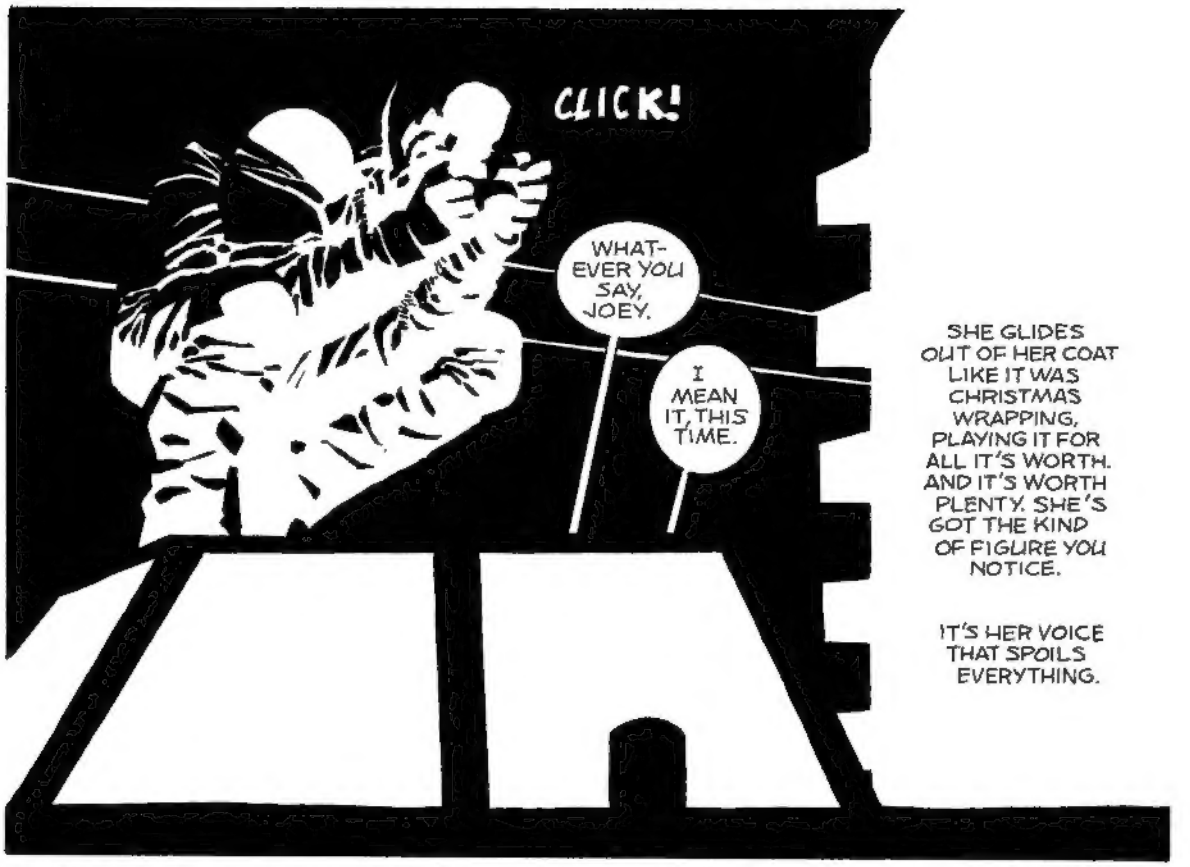
This volume collects issues one through six of the Dark Horse comic book series *Sin City: A Dame To Kill For*, originally edited by Jerry Prosser.

CHAPTER ONE


IT'S ANOTHER HOT NIGHT, DRY AND WINDLESS. THE KIND THAT MAKES PEOPLE DO SWEATY, SECRET THINGS.
I WAIT AND I LISTEN.
FOR A WHILE IT'S AS QUIET AS IT GETS IN SIN CITY. COYOTE CALLS FROM THE HILLS. POLICE SIRENS, RISING, FALLING, CUTTING THROUGH THE TRAFFIC'S WHITE-NOISE ROAR.
MY RIGHT CALF IS BEGINNING TO CRAMP UP AND I'M THINKING ABOUT GOING DOWNSTAIRS AND GETTING MY MONEY BACK FROM THE BELLHOP WHEN I HEAR THE JANGLE OF KEYS AT THE DOOR AND THEY COME IN...
THIS IS THE LAST TIME, SALLY. IT'S GOT TO BE THE LAST TIME.


CLICK!
WHAT-EVER YOU SAY, JOEY.
I MEAN IT, THIS TIME.
SHE GLIDES OUT OF HER COAT LIKE IT WAS CHRISTMAS WRAPPING, PLAYING IT FOR ALL IT'S WORTH. AND IT'S WORTH PLENTY. SHE'S GOT THE KIND OF FIGURE YOU NOTICE.
IT'S HER VOICE THAT SPOILS EVERYTHING.

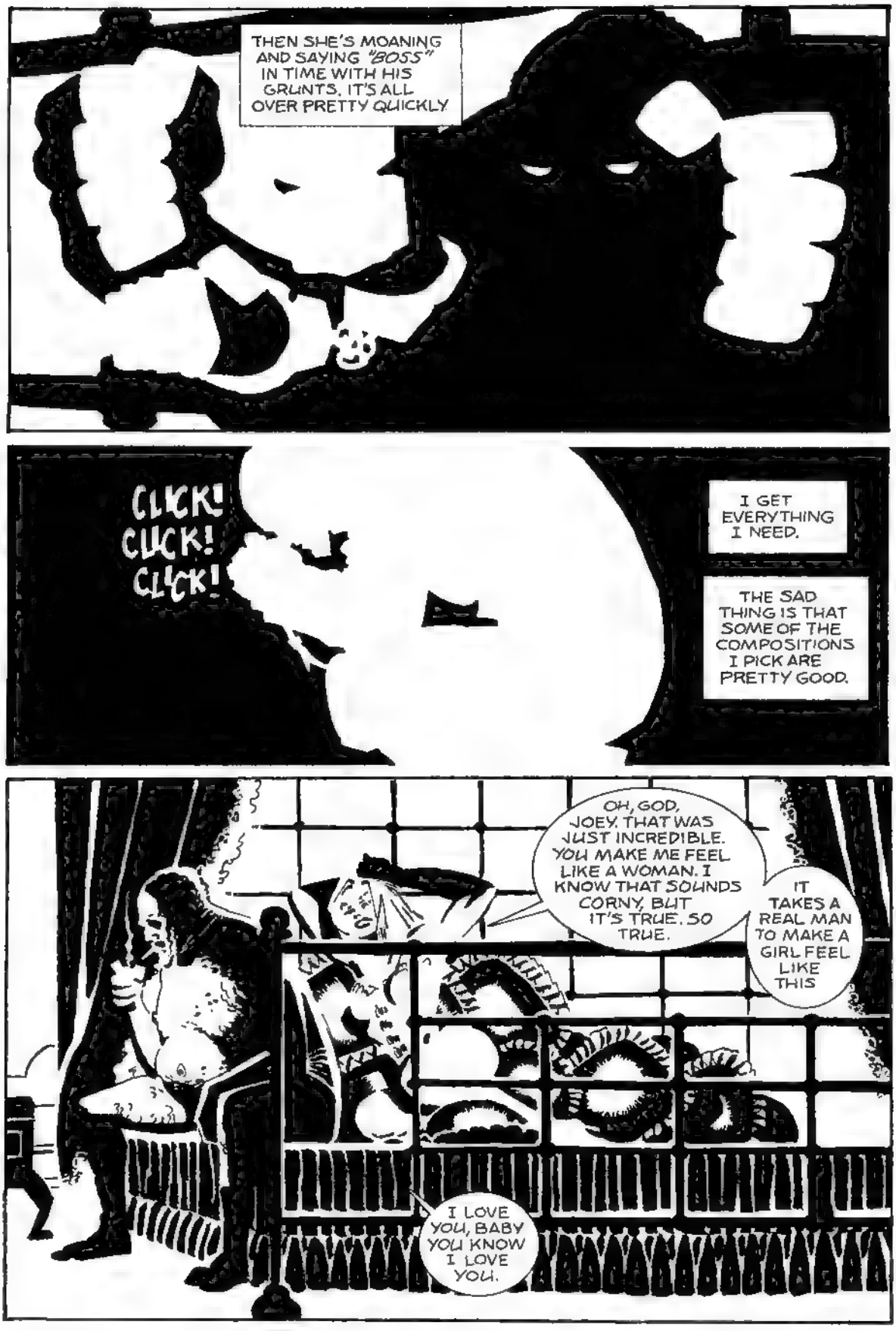
CLICK!
A LITTLE GIRL'S VOICE, ALL SQUEAKY AND MOUSY AND BUBBLY AND BOUNCY WITH FALSE INNOCENCE...
I HAD A DREAM ABOUT YOU LAST NIGHT, JOEY. IT WAS A NICE DREAM. DO YOU WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT?

NO. NO DREAMS TONIGHT. I HAVEN'T GOT THE TIME. I HAVEN'T GOT ANY TIME. I HAVE TO GET HOME. SOON. AND THIS IS THE END FOR US. THE LAST TIME. I CAN'T GO ON TAKING THE CHANCE.
WHATEVER YOU SAY, JOEY. YOU GIVE THE ORDERS. YOU'RE THE BOSS.
SHE ADDS A GOOD HALF-DOZEN EXTRA SYLLABLES TO "BOSS," ENDING IT WITH A THROUGH-THE-TEETH HISS THAT'S ALL BUSINESS.
AND ALREADY HE'S BREATHING HARD, THE JERK.
CLICK!
IT'S GLORIA, DAMN HER. SHE'S ASKING ALL KINDS OF QUESTIONS. SHE SUSPECTS SOMETHING. SHE'LL SUE. SHE'LL GET EVERY-THING.

EVERY-THING YOU'VE WORKED SO HARD FOR.
YOU'RE DAMN RIGHT I WORK HARD. I WORK MY BUTT OFF. NIGHT AND DAY. I ALWAYS HAVE. BUILT MY BUSINESS UP OUT OF NOTHING. NOTHING.
AND NOBODY APPRECIATES YOU, DO THEY, JOEY? NOT LIKE YOU DESERVE.
NO. NOBODY. NOT THE EMPLOYEES I KEEP OFF FOOD STAMPS--AND NOT GLORIA, DAMN HER, MY OWN WIFE. LIVING IN THAT HOUSE I BOUGHT HER. WEARING THOSE CLOTHES I BOUGHT HER. WITH MY MONEY. MY HARD-EARNED MONEY. AND SHE DOESN'T APPRECIATE A DAMN THING.

SHE DOESN'T EVEN TRY TO UNDERSTAND THE KIND OF PRESSURE I'M UNDER. SHE DOESN'T EVEN TRY. DAMN HER. SHE'S ALWAYS COMING AT ME. ALWAYS MAKING DEMANDS. NEVER GIVING ME A BREAK. JUST LIKE ALL THOSE LAZY BUMS WHO WOULDN'T HAVE A PAYCHECK IF I DIDN'T SIGN IT -- THEY CAN GET SICK, BUT ME? NOT A CHANCE!
IT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE SO STRONG.
YOU'RE DAMN RIGHT ABOUT THAT! BUT DO I GET ANY CREDIT? HELL, NO! THEY JUST TAKE AND TAKE!
ONE OF THESE DAYS I'LL FIRE THE WHOLE PACK OF THEM! SHOW THEM WHO'S THE BIG MAN! SHOW THEM WHO'S BOSS!
YOU CAN SHOW ME, JOEY.

CHINK
YOU CAN SHOW ME WHO'S BOSS.
SNAP
I WILL...
SNAP
I'LL SHOW YOU... I'LL SHOW YOU WHO'S BOSS...


THEN SHE'S MOANING AND SAYING "BOSS" IN TIME WITH HIS GRUNTS. IT'S ALL OVER PRETTY QUICKLY
CLICK! CLICK! CLICK!
I GET EVERYTHING I NEED.
THE SAD THING IS THAT SOME OF THE COMPOSITIONS I PICK ARE PRETTY GOOD.
OH, GOD, JOEY. THAT WAS JUST INCREDIBLE. YOU MAKE ME FEEL LIKE A WOMAN. I KNOW THAT SOUNDS CORNY, BUT IT'S TRUE. SO TRUE.
IT TAKES A REAL MAN TO MAKE A GIRL FEEL LIKE THIS
I LOVE YOU, BABY YOU KNOW I LOVE YOU.

I LOVE YOU TOO, JOEY YOU'RE ALL THE MAN I'LL EVER NEED. I COUNT THE MINUTES, WHEN YOU'RE GONE. I HONESTLY DO.
MY WRISTS HURT, JOEY THINK YOU COULD GET THE KEYS? THEY'RE RIGHT IN MY PURSE
YOU DON'T HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU. HOW MUCH I'VE SACRIFICED. IT'S TEARING ME UP INSIDE...
JOEY-- WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
IT'S TEARING ME UP! HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU--AND WHAT I HAVE TO DO! BUT I'VE WORKED HARD! DAMN HARD! AND GLORIA WOULD GET EVERYTHING! IT'S ALL HER FAULT! I DON'T HAVE ANY CHOICE!

JOEY NO. PLEASE. I WON'T TELL ANYBODY. I SWEAR TO GOD.
I KNOW YOU WON'T *WANT* TO TALK, SALLY. I KNOW THAT...
OH, MY ACHING BACK...
...BUT YOU'RE ONLY HUMAN. AND GLORIA WILL OFFER A LOT OF MONEY. MY MONEY. MY OWN MONEY AND SHE'LL USE IT TO BRING ME DOWN...
I'LL GO AWAY. I'LL LEAVE TOWN AND GO SOMEPLACE SHE'LL NEVER FIND ME
YEAH? AND HOW WILL YOU GET THERE? FLY? AND WHO WILL PAY FOR THE TICKET? THE TICKET AND GOD KNOWS WHAT ELSE! AN APARTMENT? A CAR? CLOTHES? YOU'LL SUCK ME DRY AND YOU'LL NEVER STOP!

JOEY-- I BEG YOU, BABY...
DON'T MAKE THIS ANY HARDER THAN IT IS, DAMN YOU!
KA-
SHHHH
YAAA

KILL HIM!
KILL HIM!
WHEEB
BLAGG

NOBODY'S KILLING ANYBODY. NOT WHILE I'M AROUND.

"THEN CAN I HAVE A RIDE?" SHE ASKS, USING HER REAL VOICE THIS TIME, A VOICE THAT'S LEFT INNOCENCE A LIFETIME BEHIND.

I GRAB THE KEYS AND UNCUFF HER. I LEAVE THE JERK FOR HOUSE-KEEPING.

ON THE WAY OUT SHE GIVES HIM A KICK THAT'LL STILL HURT LIKE HELL WHEN HE COMES TO

I TAKE REDONDO OVER THE HILL, TOWARD OLD TOWN. IT TAKES LONGER THAT WAY, BUT I FIGURE WITH THE WAY SHE'S SHAKING SHE COULD USE THE TIME TO SETTLE DOWN. AT FIRST ALL SHE CAN DO IS SOB AND BLOW HER NOSE AND SMOKE CIGARETTES.

SHE SMOKES SIX CIGARETTES.

SHE'S JUST ABOUT PULLED HERSELF TOGETHER WHEN SOME CRAZY BLONDE CUTS US OFF, MAKING POOR SALLY ALMOST JUMP OUT OF HER SKIN.

DRIVING LIKE A BAT OUT OF HELL, THAT ONE.

CRAZY.

THERE'S NEVER A GOOD REASON FOR BREAKING THE SPEED LIMIT.

THE LAST I SEE OF SALLY, SHE'S FIXED HER MAKEUP AND SHE'S SAUNTERING AWAY LIKE A PRO, TOSSING ME A WAVE AND A WINK, ONE HOOKER TO ANOTHER.

THEN SHE BLENDS INTO THE SEA OF FLESH THAT IS OLD TOWN.

OLD TOWN. WHERE BEAUTY IS CHEAP, PROVIDED ALL YOU WANT TO DO IS LOOK.

BUT IF YOU'RE READY TO PAY, YOU CAN HAVE ANYTHING YOU CAN IMAGINE.

I HOLD TIGHT TO THE WHEEL TO KEEP MY HANDS FROM SHAKING. I PULL OUT AND CUT BACK OVER THE HILL. OUT. AWAY.

I PUT THE GAME ON AND PRAY IT WILL CHASE AWAY THE MEMORIES. THE DAMN OLD TOWN MEMORIES, OF DRUNKEN MORNINGS AND SWEATY SEX AND STUPID, BLOODY BRAWLS.

YOU CAN'T JUST PICK AND CHOOSE. YOU CAN'T TAKE THE GOOD WITHOUT THE BAD.

NOT ONCE YOU LET THE MONSTER OUT.

THE TEAM'S UP BY TWELVE LATE IN THE THIRD WHEN I PULL UP TO AGAMEMNON'S. I SHOULD BE HOME IN TIME TO CATCH THE FOURTH-QUARTER REPLAY AT ELEVEN.

AGAMEMNON'S EATING, LIKE ALWAYS. AND HE'S CHEERFUL, ALSO LIKE ALWAYS.

IT'S AGAMEMNON WHO GOT ME INTO THESE MARITAL JOBS. IT'S HIS SPECIALTY. HE TOSSES ME WORK HE CAN'T HANDLE BECAUSE HE'S SO FAT. HE KEEPS HALF THE MONEY, WHICH I THINK IS FAIR, CONSIDERING I GET TO USE HIS DARKROOM UNTIL I CAN AFFORD MY OWN EQUIPMENT WHICH I HOPE IS SOON, BECAUSE EVEN THOUGH I'M GRATEFUL TO THE GUY FOR THE WORK, AGAMEMNON MAKES ME SICK.

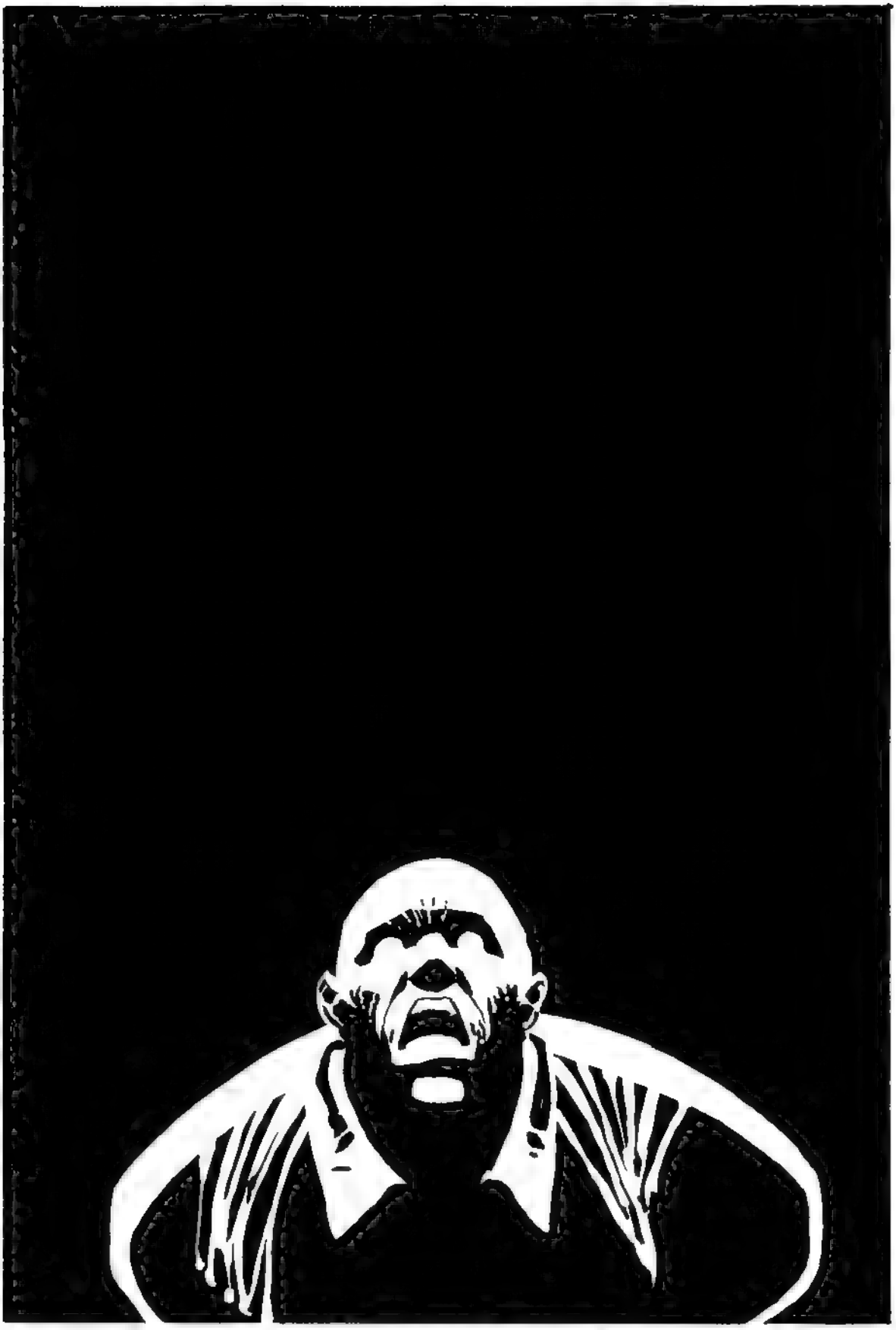
THE CANELLI JOB? GOD DAMN! I KNEW THAT BUM COULDN'T KEEP IT IN HIS PANTS MUCH LONGER!
YOU CATCH THE GAME? OUR BOY GABRIEL IS KICKING BUTT!
KISS ME I'M GREEK
YEAH. THE BLUES MIGHT JUST GO ALL THE WAY, THIS YEAR.
I'M HOPING TO CATCH THE REPLAY AT ELEVEN.
IF I HAD TO NAIL IT DOWN, I'D SAY THE MAIN REASON AGAMEMNON MAKES ME SICK IS HOW MUCH HE LOVES HIS JOB.
OH, YEAH... OH, BOY... OH, YEAH ... YOU'RE A GENIUS, KID... OH, YEAH ... GOD, JUST LOOK AT THEM...

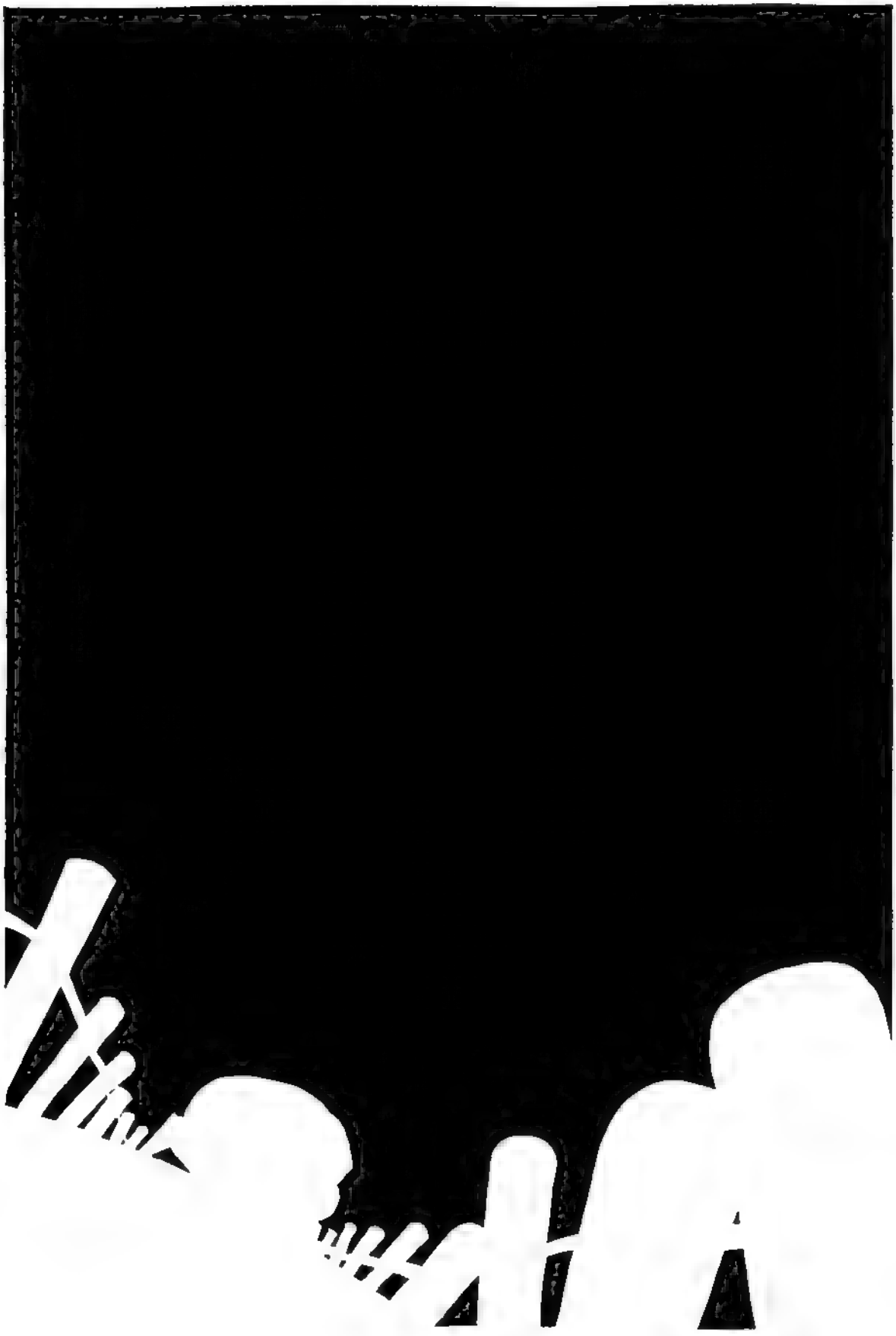
...WILL YOU GET A LOAD OF THOSE HOOTERS? STRAIGHT OUT OF PLAYBOY MAGAZINE! AND KNOWING YOU, YOU DIDN'T GET YOURSELF A PIECE OF THAT, DID YOU? NAH, NOT CLEAN LIVER, NOT THE BOY SCOUT.
HANDCUFFS. IT'S FUNNY, YOU KNOW. HOW MANY OF THEM GO FOR THE HANDCUFFS. ESPECIALLY THE BUSINESSMEN. AND JUDGES, TOO. YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE HOW MANY JUDGES GO FOR THE CUFFS.
SOME OF THEM LIKE THE GALS TO WEAR THEM, AND SOME LIKE TO PUT THEM ON THEMSELVES. I TELL YA, I COULD WRITE A BOOK...
MAYBE TOMORROW I'LL GO TO THE TIMES AND CRAWL ON MY BELLY AND BEG GILLERAN FOR MY OLD JOB BACK. MAYBE HE'LL GIVE ME A BREAK. HE SAID I DESERVED A PULITZER, ONCE.
BUT THAT WAS THEN.

I DRIVE TEN BLOCKS OUT OF MY WAY AND STOP FOR GAS I DON'T NEED, SCREWING UP MY COURAGE FOR THE WORST OF IT.
THE WIFE.
THIS ONE'S GOT A LAWYER TO PAY THE TAB AND DO THE TALKING, SO IT'S EASIER.
...IN CASH, AS YOU REQUESTED. YOU MAY BE CALLED UPON FOR A DEPOSITION PLEASE LEAVE BY THE SIDE EXIT.

THE MUSTANG SHUDDERS, ANGRY, ACTING LIKE THE WILD HORSE IT WAS NAMED AFTER, BEGGING TO CUT LOOSE AND SHOW WHAT IT CAN DO.
I DON'T LET IT
I'VE GOT THE RADIO TUNED TO SOME LONELY HEARTS TALK SHOW, BUT I'M NOT LISTENING. ONE MORE TIME, I SORT THROUGH THE BROKEN PIECES OF MY PAST. AND LIKE ALWAYS, THEY COME TOGETHER TO FORM THE SAME, SORRY PICTURE
I THINK ABOUT ALL THE WAYS I'VE SCREWED UP AND WHAT I'D GIVE FOR ONE CLEAR CHANCE TO WIPE THE SLATE CLEAN. TO DIG MY WAY OUT OF THE NUMB, GREY HELL I'VE MADE OF MY LIFE.
I'D GIVE ANYTHING.
JUST TO CUT LOOSE. JUST TO FEEL THE FIRE. ONE MORE TIME.

VROOM!
NO!
SCREE
NO. DAMN IT. NO. NEVER NEVER.
NEVER LOSE CONTROL. NOT FOR ONE SECOND. NEVER.
NEVER LET THE MONSTER OUT.





CHAPTER TWO

FOURTH-QUARTER REPLAY.
--AND IT'S DONNER ON A FAST BREAK--AND THERE'S GABRIEL WITH A STEAL--WHAT A STEAL! --TEARING UP COURT--HE SHOOTS--FOULED HARD--IT NEEDS A BOUNCE--YES!
SCORE!
RING!
303
302

--AND THEY'RE CALLING A FLAGRANT FOUL ON MARK DONNER! THAT'S IT! HE'S OUT OF THERE!
GABRIEL SHOOTS THE FOUL-- YES!
SCORE!
RING!

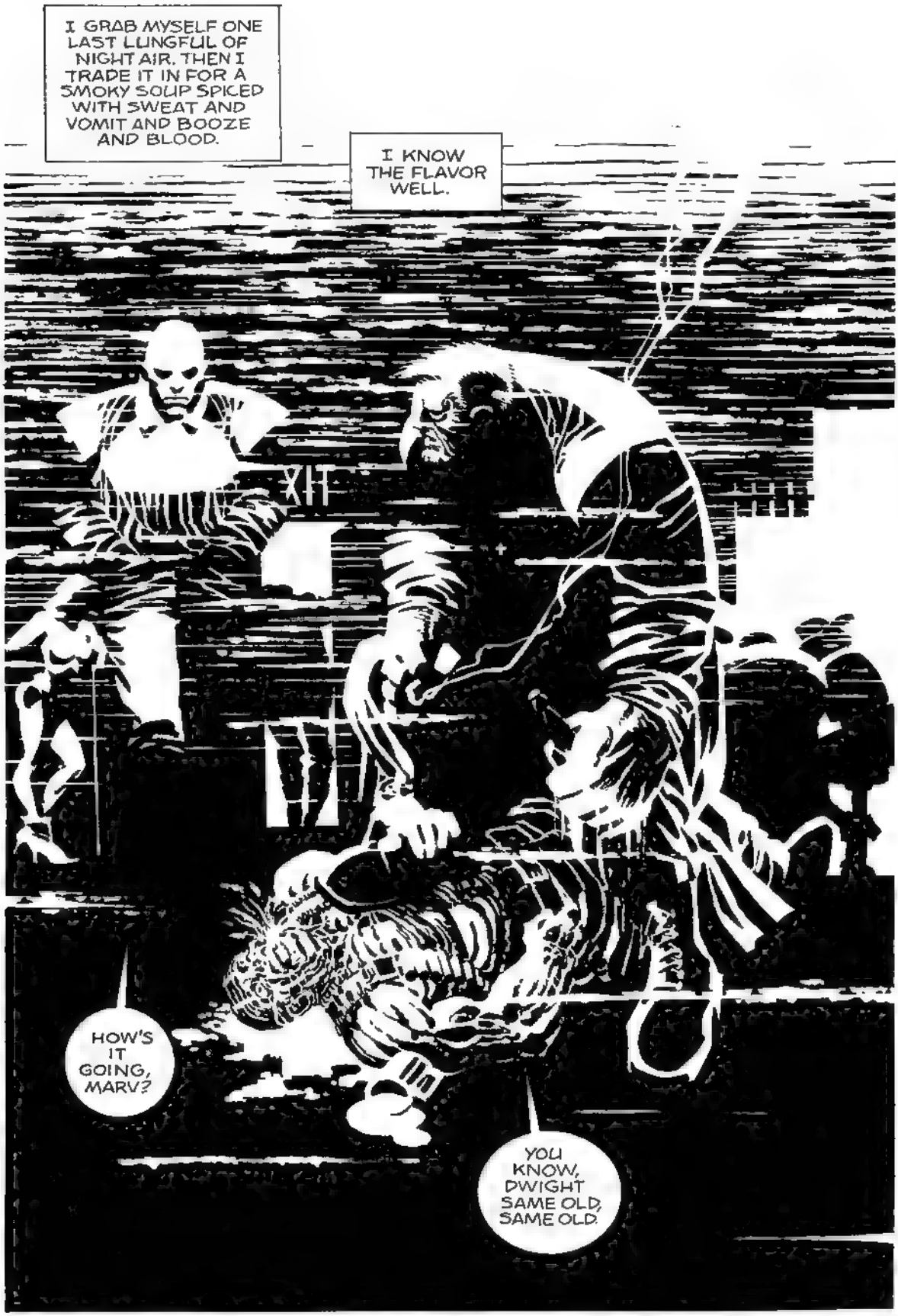
HELLO?
THIS ONE'S HISTORY, FOLKS...

DWIGHT? IS THAT YOU?

AVA

I'M SORRY TO CALL. I KNOW I'VE GOT NO RIGHT. BUT I NEED TO SEE YOU. TONIGHT. PLEASE, DWIGHT. DON'T HANG UP PLEASE.

SHE KEEPS TALKING
AND LIKE AN IDIOT, I KEEP LISTENING.
AVA.
DAMN.
I SHOULD TELL HER TO GO TO HELL. INSTEAD I GIVE MYSELF A SHAVE I DON'T NEED AND I SHOW UP TWENTY MINUTES EARLY.
AVA DAMN.
WHAT THE HELL COULD SHE WANT WITH ME NOW?
CLUB PECOS
HE'D DESERVE IT...
GLAKK
SURE, BILL. LET'S GET YOU HOME
YOU CAN'T DRIVE TWO BLOCKS IN SIN CITY WITHOUT COMING ACROSS A SALOON. THIS ONE'S A COUNTRY JOINT, THE BAD KIND.
IT'S NOT THE KIND OF PLACE I'D EXPECT HER TO KNOW ABOUT, LET ALONE GO TO.


I GRAB MYSELF ONE LAST LUNGFUL OF NIGHT AIR. THEN I TRADE IT IN FOR A SMOKY SOUP SPICED WITH SWEAT AND VOMIT AND BOOZE AND BLOOD.
I KNOW THE FLAVOR WELL.
HOW'S IT GOING, MARV?
YOU KNOW, DWIGHT SAME OLD, SAME OLD.

HAVEN'T SEEN YOU IN A DOG'S AGE, PAL YOU BEEN OUT OF TOWN?
NO, JUST BUSY. YOU TAKE CARE, MARV.
MARV'S A GUY YOU'VE GOT TO BE CAREFUL AROUND. HE DOESN'T MEAN ANY HARM, BUT HE CAUSES PLENTY
THE POOR SLOB JUST ANOTHER LOSER IN A JOINT THAT'S FULL OF THEM.
WHY HERE, AVA? IT'S NOT LIKE YOU. NO, WITH YOU EVERYTHING ALWAYS HAD TO BE FIRST CLASS ALL THE WAY.
AND WHEN I COULDN'T FOOT THE BILL, YOU SURE AS HELL FOUND SOMEBODY WHO COULD

I ORDER UP A GINGER ALE AND STARE AT IT FOR THE BETTER PART OF AN HOUR
SHE'S LATE, LIKE SHE ALWAYS WAS
AND LIKE ALWAYS, SHE'S WORTH THE WAIT.

DWIGHT... HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN? FOUR YEARS?
SOUNDS ABOUT RIGHT. HAVE A SEAT.
SHE ASKS FOR SOME KIND OF SCOTCH NOBODY'S EVER HEARD OF, THEN SETTLES FOR WHAT THEY HAVE.
NOT LIKE HER TO DRINK HARD STUFF. THE CIGARETTES ARE A SURPRISE, TOO. USED TO BE SHE COULDN'T STAND THE SMELL OF THEM.
SO MANY TIMES I'VE WANTED TO CALL YOU. I'VE FOUND MYSELF THINKING ABOUT YOU...
I'VE GOT PLACES TO BE. HOW ABOUT YOU JUST TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT.

SHE MOVES CLOSE, ALL VULNERABLE, A DEER CAUGHT IN THE HEADLIGHTS.
I COULD SLUG HER
DON'T BE COLD, DWIGHT. I DON'T THINK I COULD STAND THAT, RIGHT NOW. I MUST STILL MEAN SOMETHING TO YOU. YOU CAME HERE. YOU MUST STILL CARE. JUST A LITTLE BIT.
SURE. YOU CALLED AND I CAME RUNNING YOU'VE STILL GOT THAT MUCH OF A HOLD ON ME AND MAYBE YOU ALWAYS WILL. BUT I'VE GOT NO REASON AT ALL TO BE NICE ABOUT IT. NOT AFTER WHAT YOU DID TO ME.
I GUESS I DESERVED THAT
THERE'S NO GUESSING TO IT. YOU DESERVE THAT AND A WHOLE LOT MORE. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I WENT THROUGH. HOW BAD IT GOT.
MAYBE IF YOU'D FALLEN IN LOVE WITH THE SLOB I COULD'VE HANDLED IT.
BUT YOU DIDN'T LOVE HIM YOU'VE NEVER LOVED ANYBODY. MONEY WAS ALL YOU WERE AFTER YOU TOSSED ME AWAY-- FOR *CASH*
SO LET'S NOT SCREW AROUND. I'M HERE. I'M LISTENING YOU JUST TELL ME WHAT THE HELL IT IS YOU WANT
THERE'S ONLY ONE THING I WANT FROM YOU! AND I WANT IT SO DESPERATELY I COULD SCREAM! I WANT YOU TO FORGIVE ME!

OH NOW I GET IT. YOU'VE GOT A CONSCIENCE, AFTER ALL, AND IT'S BUGGING YOU.
FINE. YOU'RE FORGIVEN. YOU GOT YOUR WISH. GO HOME. SLEEP TIGHT
YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT ME! I'M NOTHING BUT A SELFISH SLUT WHO THREW AWAY THE ONLY MAN SHE EVER LOVED! JUST LIKE YOU SAID! BUT I WAS WRONG, DARLING! WRONG!
I'M IN HELL, DWIGHT. IT'S WORSE THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE... OH, GOD... I WISH I COULD GO BACK IN TIME. BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS. TO YOU AND ME. I'M SUCH A FOOL. SUCH A SELFISH, STUPID SLUT...
YOU MADE YOUR BED. SLEEP IN IT.
FORGIVE ME, DARLING. I BEG YOU. I LOVE YOU.

YOU DO THAT AGAIN AND I SWEAR TO HELL I'LL KILL YOU
IF YOU CAN'T FORGIVE ME, DARLING, THEN PLEASE -- REMEMBER ME THEY SAY YOU NEVER REALLY DIE AS LONG AS SOMEBODY REMEMBERS YOU
WHAT THE DEVIL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
MRS LORD, YOU ARE DUE AT HOME

SHE GASPS AND GRABS MY ARM AND SUDDENLY I'M PLAYING LANCELOT
I'D SAY THAT'S UP TO MRS. LORD.
THIS IS NONE OF YOUR CONCERN, SIR.
IS THAT CLOWN G VING YOU A HARD TIME, DWIGHT?
I'LL TAKE HIM DOWN FOR YOU IF YOU WANT. I GOT NOTHING GOING TONIGHT.
URP
NEVER MIND, DWIGHT. IT'S TOO LATE. I'LL GO WITH HIM.
TOO LATE FOR WHAT, AVA?
FOR EVERYTHING.
JUST REMEMBER ME, MY LOVE. REMEMBER ME.

BUDDY, I DON'T MEAN TO POKE MY NOSE IN WHERE IT DON'T BELONG, BUT THAT THERE IS A DAME TO KILL FOR. WHY'D YOU LET HER GO?
THE NIGHT AIR HASN'T GOTTEN ANY COLDER.
IT JUST FEELS THAT WAY.
AVA.
DAMN!

CHAPTER THREE

THE NEXT DAY GOES BY ALL RIGHT. I KEEP DISTRACTED. I PAY MY RENT AND ROTATE MY TIRES. I GO SEE THREE MOVIES. I DON'T THINK ABOUT AVA TOO OFTEN.

THEN NIGHT FALLS AND THERE'S NOWHERE TO HIDE. THERE'S NO GAME ON, NOBODY TO CALL. I TRY TO READ BUT IT JUST WON'T HAPPEN.

SO I GET INTO BED AND CLOSE MY EYES AND REMIND MYSELF ABOUT ALL THE REASONS WHY I SHOULDN'T GIVE A DAMN ABOUT AVA. IT DOESN'T WORK THE WRONG MEMORIES KEEP POPPING UP.

SHE RIPPED MY SOUL APART AND TOSSED AWAY THE PIECES LIKE SHE WAS EMPTYING AN ASHTRAY. BUT DOES MY MIND STAY ON THAT? HELL, NO! IT BRINGS BACK THAT LOOK SHE HAD IN HER EYES WHEN I TOLD HER ABOUT MY DAD. THAT TIME WE SMOKED POT AND GOT THE GIGGLES AND COULDN'T STOP. THAT CRAZY WAY SHE GOT SCARED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND STARTED CRYING AND HOW I HELD HER CLOSE TO ME UNTIL DAWN.

AND YEAH, I REMEMBER THE FIRE IN HER, THE FEEL OF HER BREASTS, THE TASTE SHE LEFT IN MY MOUTH

AYA.

WHAT AM I DOING *SMOKING?*
WHERE DID I GET THESE *CIGARETTES?*
NEVER GIVE AN INCH. NEVER NEVER LET THE MONSTER OUT.
IT'S AVA. MAKING YOU CRAZY, ALL OVER AGAIN.
SHAKE HER OFF. FORGET HER. WHATEVER SHE'S IN FOR, SHE DESERVES IT.
BUT DOES SHE DESERVE TO DIE? THAT'S WHAT SHE SAID. THAT SHE WAS GOING TO DIE.
MAYBE IT'S ALL A PACK OF LIES. SOME SICK JOKE SHE'S PULLING ON ME FOR THE SHEER CRUELTY OF IT.
I HAVE TO KNOW, ONE WAY OR THE OTHER.
I HAVE TO KNOW

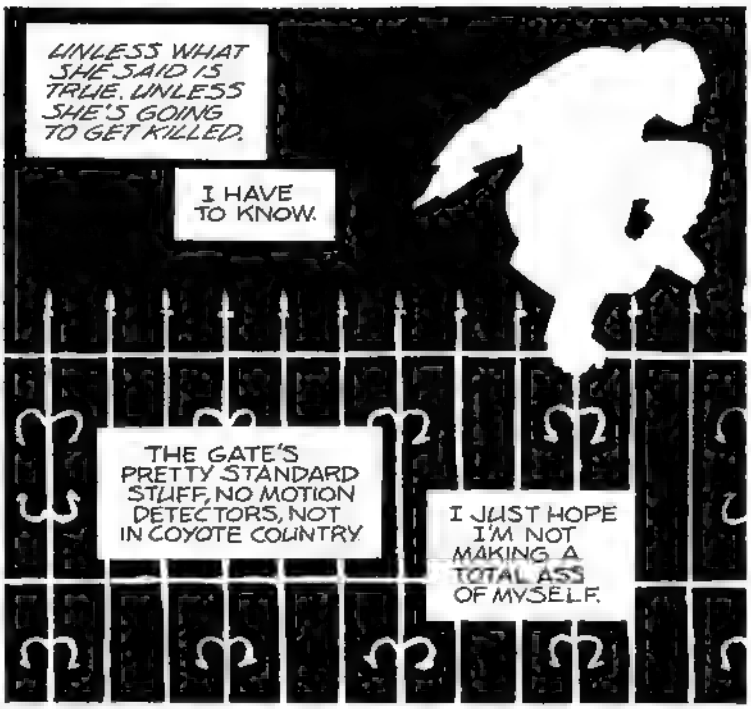
IT SHOULDN'T TAKE TOO MUCH EFFORT TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS. JUST A SIMPLE JOB OF BREAKING AND ENTERING, PUNISHABLE BY UP TO FIVE YEARS IN THE SLAMMER, IF I'M CAUGHT.

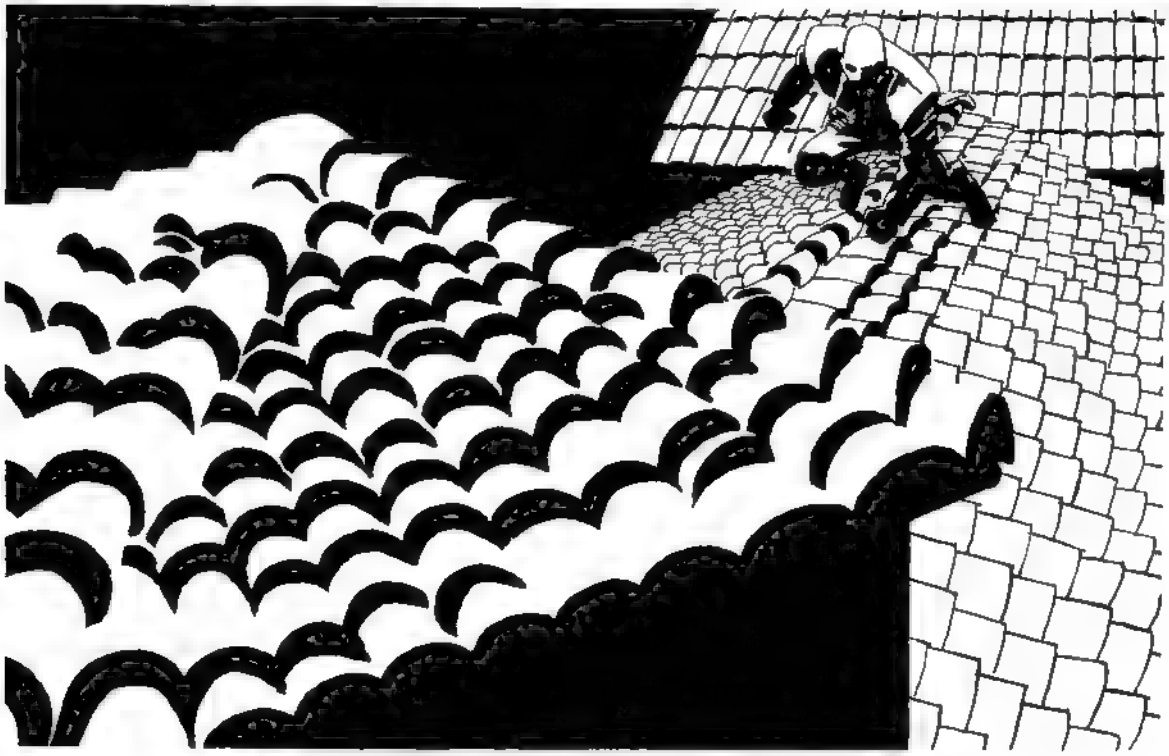
IT TAKES A HALF HOUR TO CLIMB THE HILL OUT OF SIN CITY, UP TO WHERE THE AIR BLOWS COOL AND THE RICH FOLKS LIVE.

AND THEY DON'T GET MUCH RICHER THAN DAMIEN LORD. THE GUY DINES WITH ROARKS AND ROCKEFELLERS

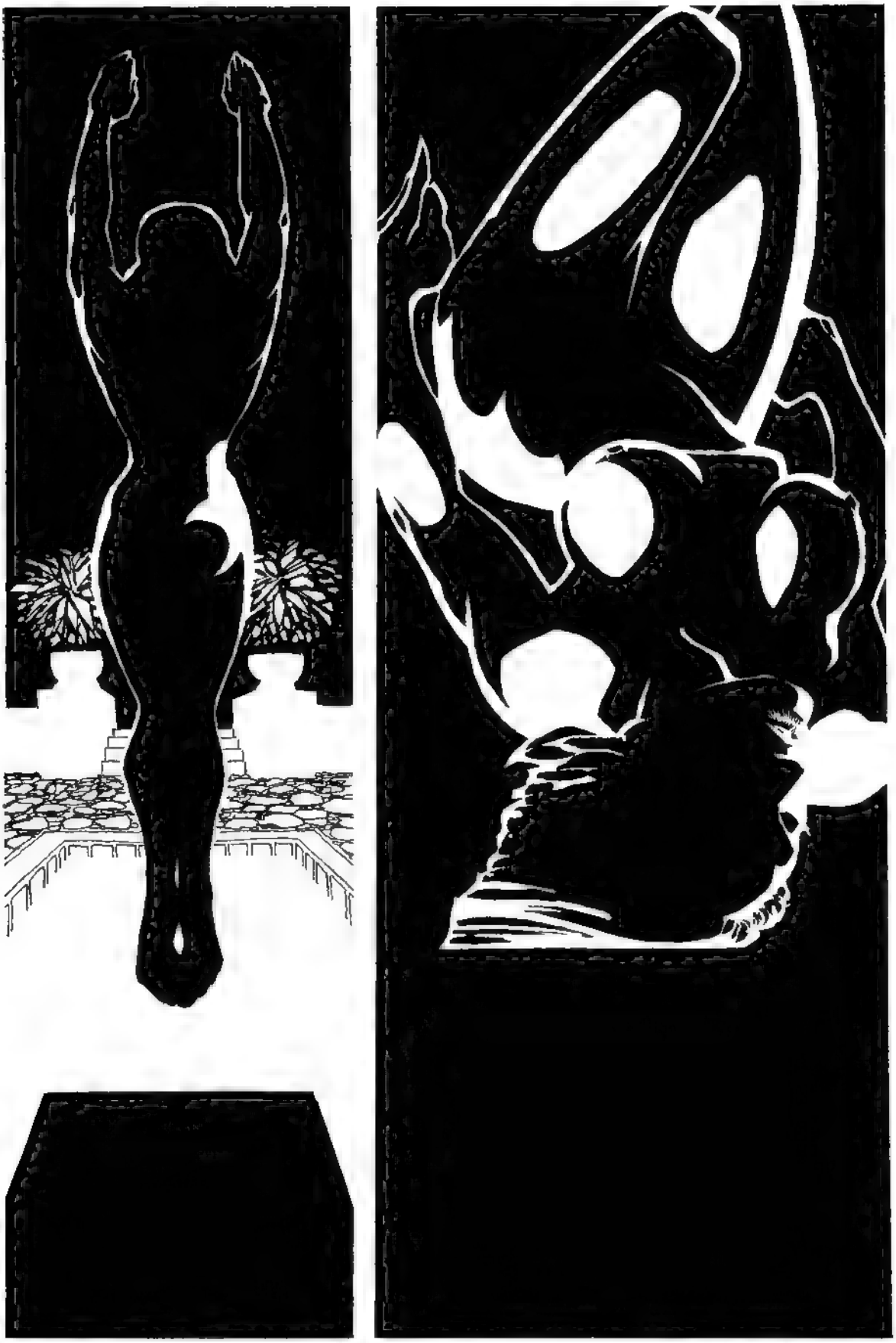
DAMIEN LORD.

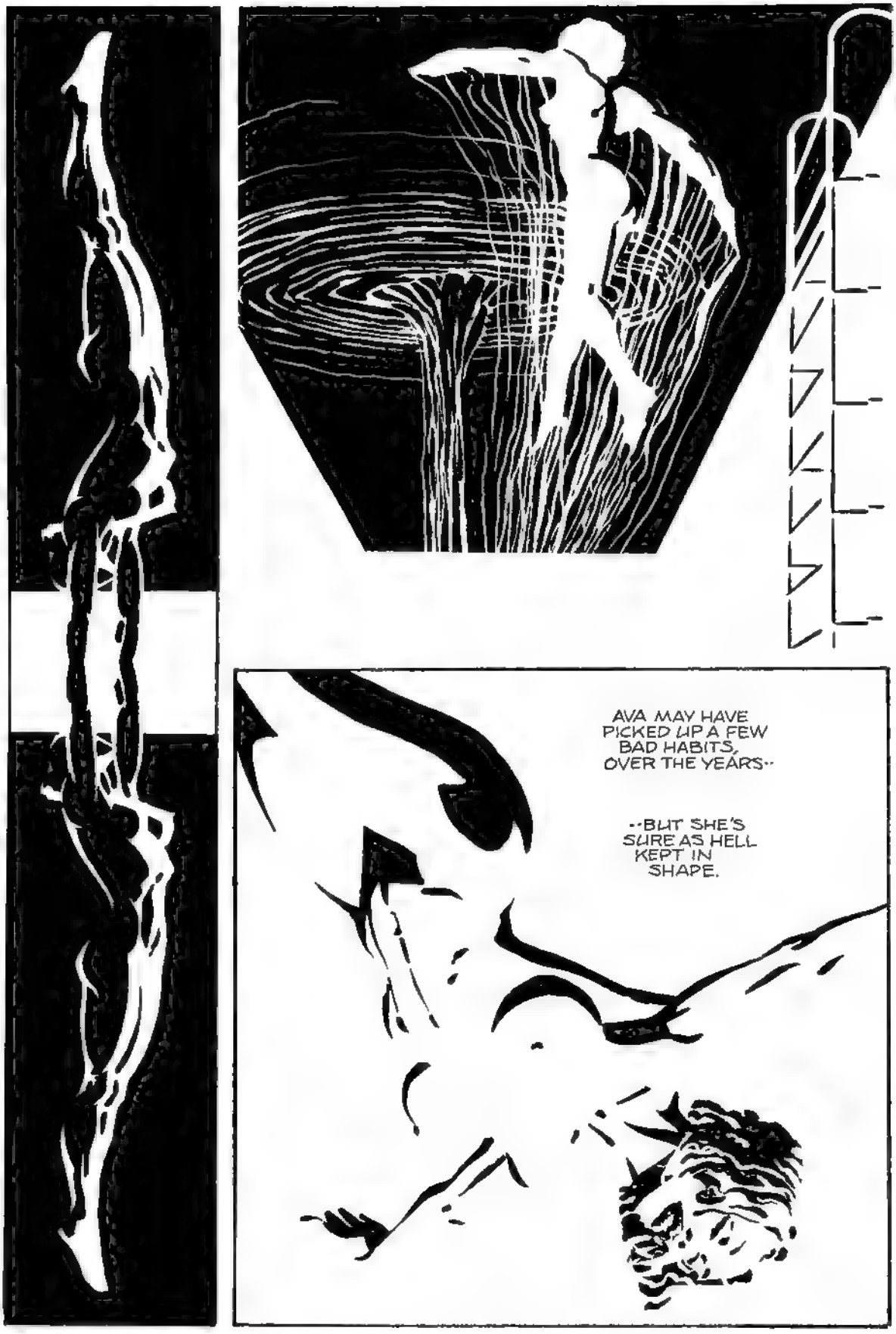
AVA'S HUSBAND.


UNLESS WHAT SHE SAID IS TRUE. UNLESS SHE'S GOING TO GET KILLED.
I HAVE TO KNOW.
THE GATE'S PRETTY STANDARD STUFF, NO MOTION DETECTORS, NOT IN COYOTE COUNTRY
I JUST HOPE I'M NOT MAKING A TOTAL ASS OF MYSELF.



MY TELESCOPIC LENS LETS ME HAVE A LOOK AROUND.
I WIND UP SEEING A LOT MORE OF AVA THAN I BARGAINED FOR.




AVA MAY HAVE PICKED UP A FEW BAD HABITS, OVER THE YEARS..
--BUT SHE'S SURE AS HELL KEPT IN SHAPE.

FREEZE, PERVERT!
DON'T MOVE A MUSCLE!
I SAID FREEZE!
BREKK
YAAAAA

OOH!
AAA
AAAA

AAAA
LET ME THROUGH, KOONTZ!
I'M SORRY, MA'AM. HE MIGHT BE ARMED.
I MUST ASK YOU WHAT YOU ARE DOING HERE, SIR.
MAKING A TOTAL ASS OF MYSELF.
HE WAS TAKING PICTURES OF MRS. LORD, THE PERVERT
THE BIG GUY--IT WAS HIM WHO TOOK AVA AWAY FROM THE SALOON. BUT HE DOESN'T SEEM TO RECOGNIZE ME.
BETTER LET THEM THINK I'M JUST A PEEPING TOM. WHATEVER TROUBLE AVA'S IN, I DON'T WANT TO MAKE IT WORSE.

A DOOR SLIDES OPEN WITH A WHISPER DAMIEN LORD LOOKS ME OVER LIKE I'M SOMETHING THAT FELL OUT OF THE BACK END OF A HORSE WHICH IS PRETTY MUCH HOW I FEEL ABOUT MYSELF RIGHT THIS MINUTE.
AND WHAT DO WE HAVE HERE, MANUTE?
I LIKE TO TAKE PICTURES
AN INTRUDER, SIR A VOYEUR, BY ALL APPEARANCES. RATHER PATHETIC, DON'T YOU THINK?

I KNOW IT'S WRONG. I'M GETTING HELP. BUT SOMETIMES I CAN'T STOP MYSELF. I DON'T HURT ANYBODY.

WE NEEDN'T INVOLVE THE POLICE IN THIS, NEED WE?

NO, SIR. I HAVE THE SITUATION WELL IN HAND

VERY WELL, THEN. TEND TO HIM.

YES, SIR. SLEEP WELL, SIR.

AND FOR GOODNESS SAKE, AVA. DO GET SOME CLOTHES ON YOURSELF.

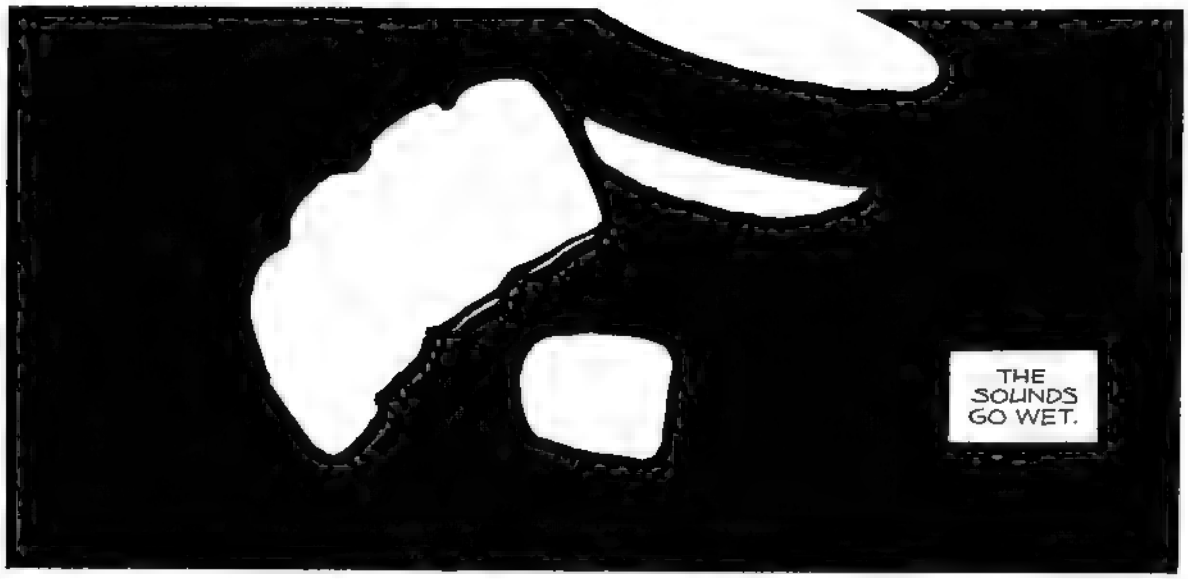
ROT IN HELL, DAMIEN.

HMPH!

FOR A SECOND IT'S LIKE HE DOES RECOGNIZE ME, AFTER ALL. THEN HIS EYES GO COLD, A KILLER'S EYES.
SKRYKK

AN ATOM BOMB GOES OFF BETWEEN MY LEGS
WHYKK

KRAKK
A FREIGHT TRAIN BARRELS INTO MY JAW.
ANOTHER TRAIN.
SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY, AVA SCREAMS


THE SOUNDS GO WET.

MAYBE HE KEEPS HITTING ME. I DON'T KNOW. I'M GONE
GONE TO THAT PLACE WHERE THERE IS NO PAIN OR THOUGHT.

I WAKE UP IN MID-AIR. THE PAVEMENT RUSHES UP TO GIVE ME A BIG, SLOPPY KISS.

KHEFF
KHAGG
I FIND A PAY PHONE AND CALL AGAMEMNON AND ASK HIM TO COME AND PICK ME UP. HE MAKES ME PROMISE TO BUY HIM A TANK OF GAS AND A PIZZA WITH THE WORKS.
I GUESS I BLACK OUT AGAIN.
ΚΟΠΡΟΣ ΦΑΝΕΤΑΙ
VESUS ON A STICK!
YOU AIN'T GONE BACK ON THE SAUCE, HAVE YOU, KID?
NO. I JUST GOT MUGGED.

AGAMEMNON PULLS OVER AT A CHINESE JOINT AND SUCKS BACK SWEET-AND-SOUR ROADKILL WHILE I MOP THE BLOOD OFF MY FACE. THEN WE PICK UP THAT PIZZA I PROMISED HIM
I WOULDA BET MY RIGHT NUT YOU BEEN HITTING THE BOTTLE AGAIN, SEEING YOU LIKE THAT... MAN, YOU WERE A BAD ONE BACK THEN.
I TELL YA, I COULD WRITE A BOOK...
ANOTHER STOP, THIS ONE FOR CHILI BURGERS. SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY I REALIZE I DON'T HAVE MY KEYS.
I'LL HAVE TO PICK MY OWN LOCK.
?!
THEN I SPOT MY MUSTANG, WHICH MAKES NO SENSE
MY WORD, MR. McCARTHY JUST LOOK AT YOU. YOU'RE NOT HAVING TROUBLE AGAIN, ARE YOU?
NO I JUST GOT MUGGED.
WHY WOULD THEY RETURN MY CAR?
IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.

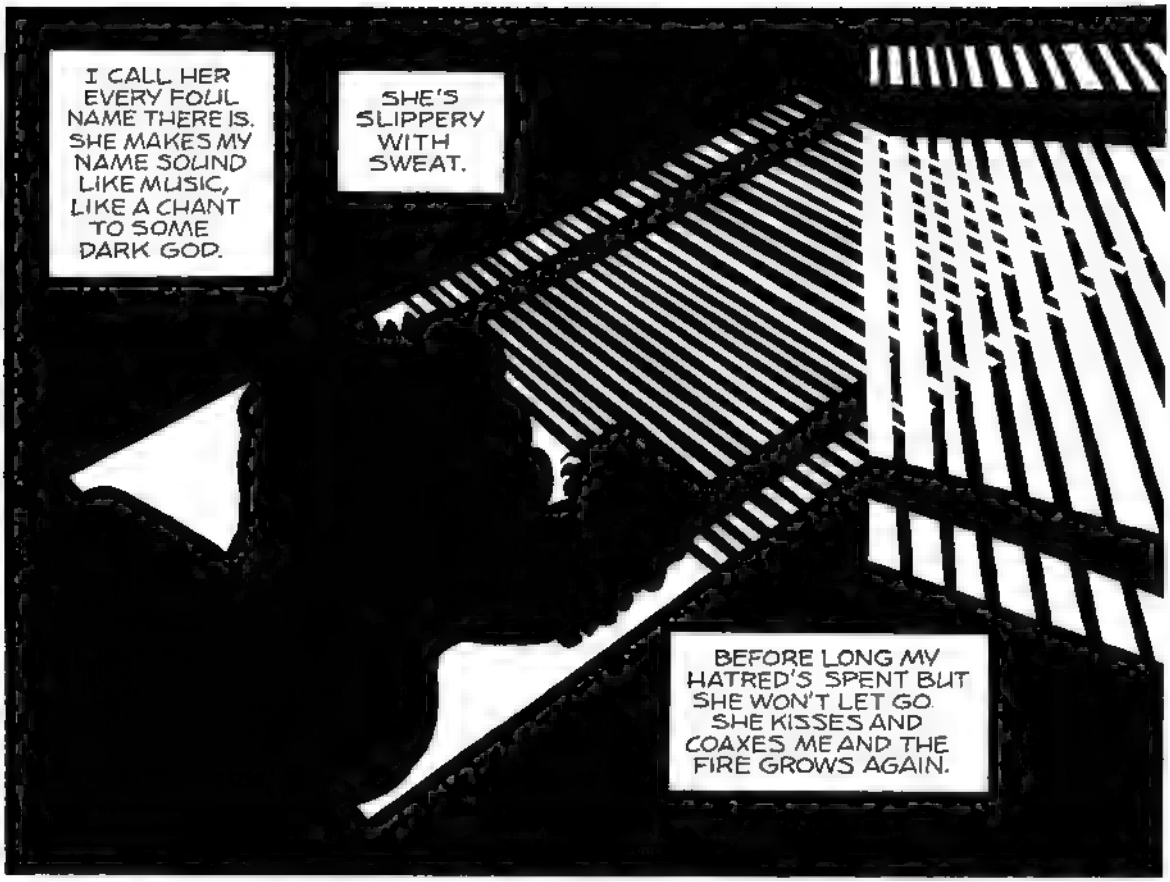
MY DOOR'S NOT LOCKED.
THAT'S NOT MY COAT.
HER CIGARETTE SMOKE.
HER PURSE.
MY BEDROOM.
GET OUT OF HERE.

NO.
I MEAN IT. PUT YOUR CLOTHES BACK ON AND GET OUT OF HERE. NOW.
NO.
YOU HAD YOUR CHANCE. I WOULD HAVE STAYED AWAY YOU NEVER WOULD HAVE SEEN ME AGAIN.
BUT YOU CAME FOR ME YOU RISKED YOUR LIFE. YOU STILL CARE. YOU STILL WANT ME. AND I'M YOURS. NOW. TONIGHT.
YOU MAKE ME SICK. YOU AND THIS CRAZY GAME YOU'RE PLAYING. GET OUT OF MY LIFE ONCE AND FOR ALL OR I'LL BASH YOUR TEETH IN.

GO BACK TO YOUR MANSION OR GO TO HELL. I DON'T CARE WHICH.
DO YOU WANT ME TO BEG? WOULD THAT AMUSE YOU? I'LL BEG. I'LL GROVEL. I HAVE NO SHAME. I'M NOTHING. I'M DIRT. I'M A LYING, TREACHEROUS WHORE WHO'S GOING TO GET WHAT I DESERVE.

BUT I MUST HAVE YOU FIRST. TONIGHT. NOW, TONIGHT, AND NEVER AGAIN IF YOU CAN'T LOVE ME--HATE ME. IF YOU CAN'T FORGIVE ME --PUNISH ME
OKAY.

KRAKK


I CALL HER EVERY FOUL NAME THERE IS. SHE MAKES MY NAME SOUND LIKE MUSIC, LIKE A CHANT TO SOME DARK GOD.
SHE'S SLIPPERY WITH SWEAT.
BEFORE LONG MY HATRED'S SPENT BUT SHE WON'T LET GO. SHE KISSES AND COAXES ME AND THE FIRE GROWS AGAIN.

I'M DRAGGED TO THE GROUND BY A JUNGLE CAT. SHE DEVOURS ME AND I THANK HER FOR IT.

WE SOB AND SNIVEL AND BAWL OUT LOUD LIKE A COUPLE OF SNOT-NOSED KIDS.
WE MELT TOGETHER.
THE SHUDDER RUNS THROUGH BOTH OF US AS I SCREAM HER NAME
AVA.
AVA!

I SAY ALL THE THINGS I SWORE I'D NEVER SAY AGAIN.
SHE OWNS ME.
BODY AND SOUL.

HER VOICE GOES FLAT, HOPELESS.
I THOUGHT I WAS READY TO DIE I'M NOT.
I THOUGHT TONIGHT WOULD MAKE IT EASIER. IT DOESN'T.
DAMIEN'S GOING TO GET HIS WISH, AFTER ALL. I'LL BEG HIM TO LET ME LIVE. BECAUSE OF YOU.
HE'S A MADMAN. A MADMAN. HE TORTURES ME IT GIVES HIM PLEASURE. IT MAKES HIM FEEL POWERFUL
MANUTE --THE MAN WHO BEAT YOU-- HE'S A SPECIALIST AT INFLICTING PAIN. HIDEOUS PAIN, IN ALL THE PLACES YOU JUST GAVE ME JOY...

...DAMIEN TALKS AND TALKS AND WATCHES WHILE MANUTE USES HIS NEEDLES--AND HIS FINGERS. THE FINGERS ARE THE WORST OF IT.
HE DOESN'T LEAVE A MARK ON ME. AT LEAST HE HASN'T SO FAR.
BUT IT'S WORSE EACH TIME. HE'S GETTING CLOSER TO HIS FINAL, SICK CLIMAX.
LATELY, DAMIEN'S SHOWN ME ...*DEVICES* HE'S ACQUIRED. STRANGE, SHARP DEVICES FROM SPAIN AND CHINA AND AFRICA. HE SHOWS ME HOW THEY WORK.
HE SAYS I'LL BE VERY *UGLY*, BEFORE I DIE.
NO, AVA. *YOU* AREN'T GOING TO DIE. *YOU'RE* COMING WITH ME.

HER LAUGH IS BLACK AND BOTTOMLESS.
NO, DARLING. NO. HE'D FIND US. HE'D FIND US AND HE'D KILL YOU AND I COULDN'T STAND KNOWING I CAUSED THAT. HE *LETS* ME RUN AWAY! HE *LAUGHS* ABOUT IT! *HE KNOWS MANUTE WILL ALWAYS FIND ME!*
I'LL FIND A WAY! I SWEAR I WILL! HE'LL NEVER GET HIS HANDS ON YOU AGAIN!
KREEEK!

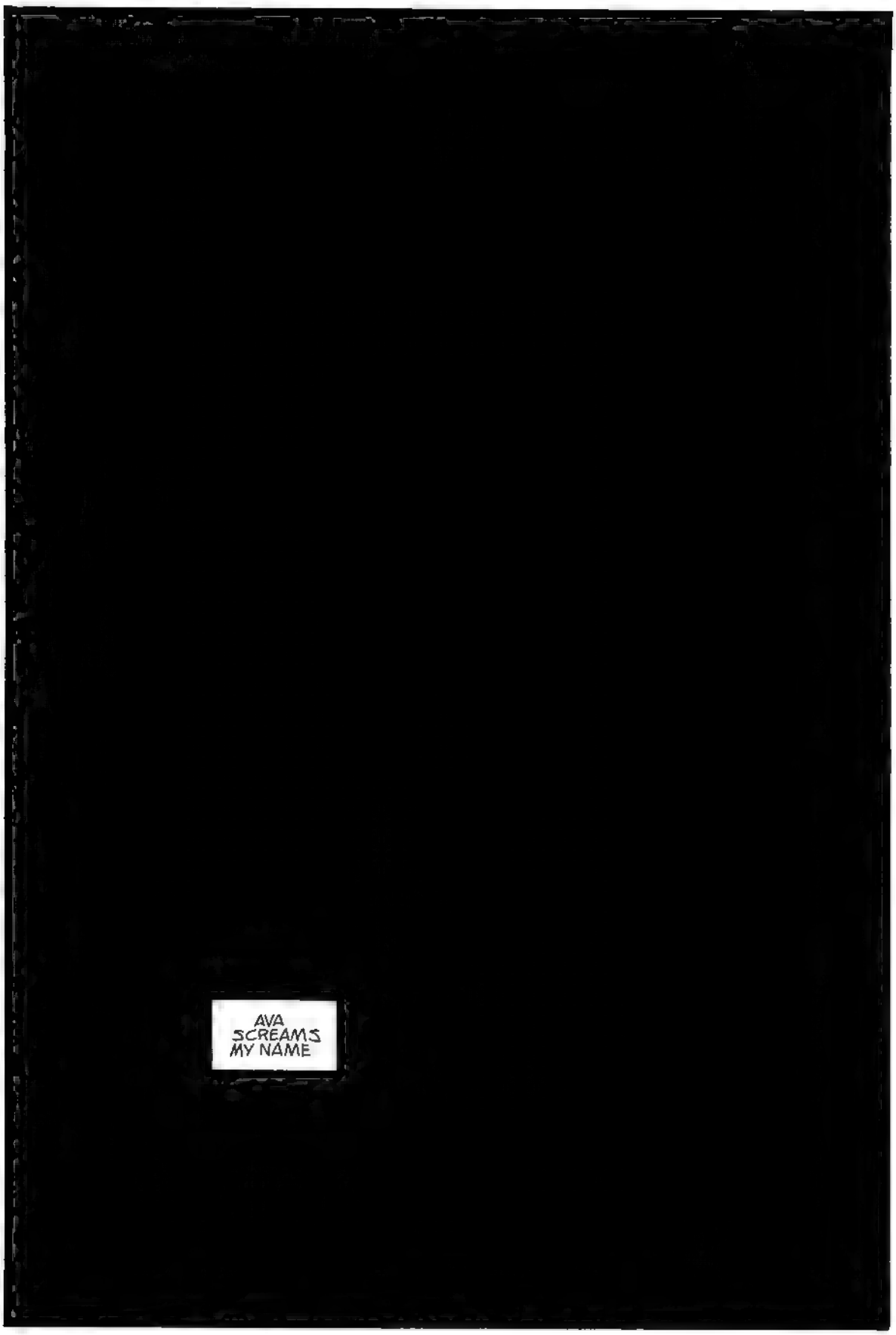
YOU HAVE BEEN VERY BAD, MRS LORD. MR. LORD WILL REQUIRE THAT YOU BE DISCIPLINED. COME ALONG I WILL FETCH YOUR COAT.
NO, DWIGHT DON'T FIGHT HIM. HE'LL KILL YOU HE'S NOT HUMAN. HE'LL KILL YOU
YOU WOULD DO WELL TO LISTEN TO HER, SIR.
DWIGHT! NO! I BEG YOU, MY LOVE!
HE'LL KILL YOU!!
FAPP
I PUNCH A VAULT DOOR.

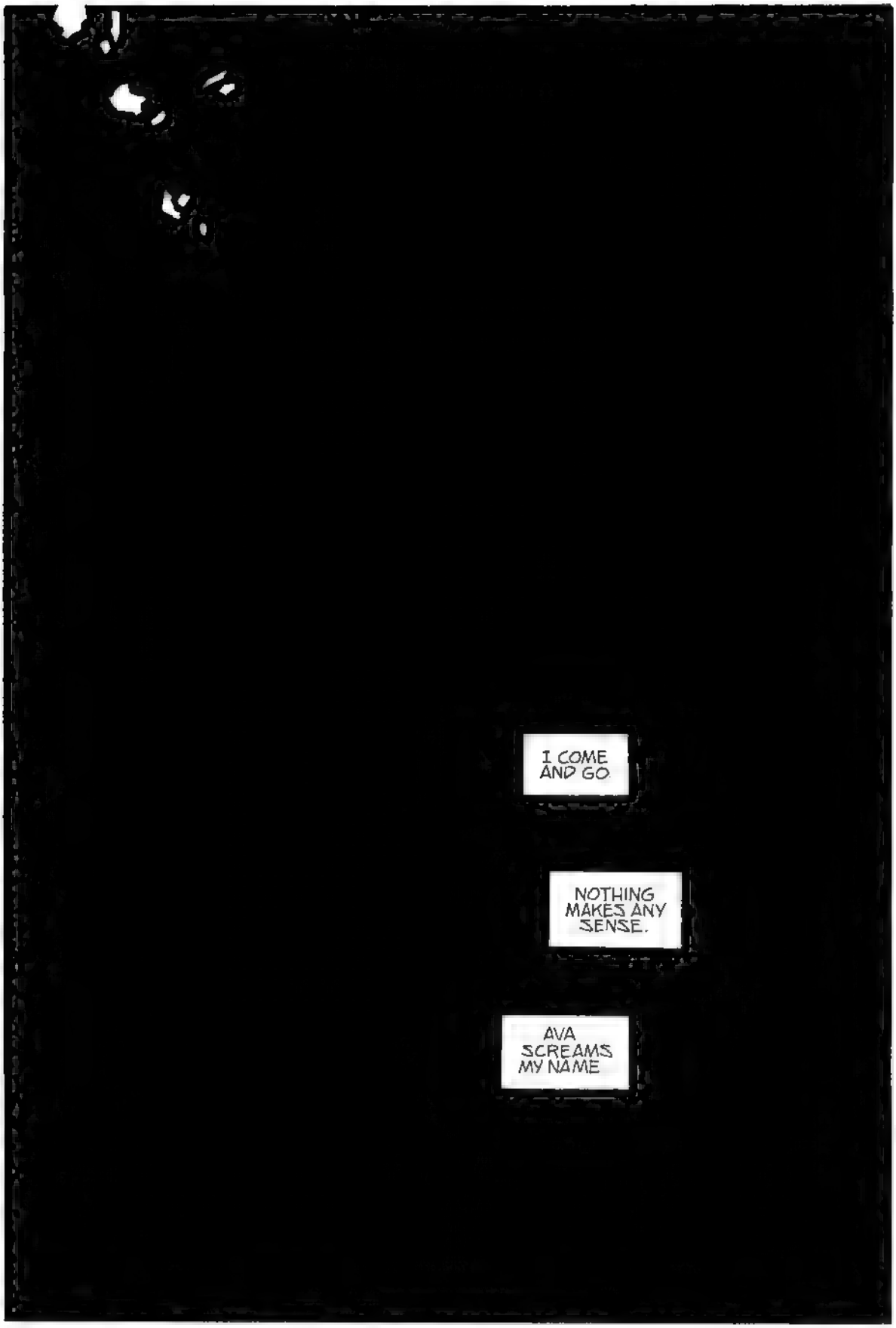
FAPP
IT DOESN'T FALL DOWN, SO I PUNCH IT AGAIN

WHUP
A WRECKING BALL HITS ME SQUARE IN THE CHEST.

HWUFF
COME ON, I'M READY FOR YOU, YOU SON OF A BITCH!!
000!
KRSTH

MRS. LORD.
YOUR COAT.


AVA
SCREAMS
MY NAME


I COME AND GO.
NOTHING MAKES ANY SENSE.
AVA SCREAMS MY NAME

I COME AND GO, RISING OUT OF IT, THEN SINKING AGAIN, DROWNING IN SOMETHING AS THICK AS PEA SOUP AND AS BLACK AS DEATH.
AVA SCREAMS MY NAME.
WITH AN OLD MAN'S ARMS I CLIMB MY WAY BACK UP

HNH?

I SPIT OUT THE LAST OF THE PEA SOUP AND LET THE HEADLIGHTS CHASE AWAY THE BLACK SPOTS.
A LITTLE VOICE REMINDS ME THAT THERE'S A CAR BEHIND THE HEADLIGHTS
WHUFF

KLWK

SCREECH
KLNK
HONK!
SCREEE
THE MONSTER IN MY GUT UNCURLS ITSELF AND ERUPTS FROM MY THROAT WITH AN ENDLESS, BLOODY ROAR
...
THEY CAN'T TAKE HER AWAY FROM ME NOT THIS TIME.

I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT TO DO.
I KNOW EXACTLY WHERE TO GO.
THIS TIME I DON'T FIGHT THE SMELLS--OR THE MEMORIES. I SUCK IT ALL IN LIKE IT WAS NECTAR, LETTING IT MAKE ME STRONG AND MEAN AND SURE.
A VOICE THAT'S MADE OUT OF WET GRAVEL BLARES OUT OF RATTY SPEAKERS, SINGING SOMETHING ABOUT BOURBON AND PATRIOTISM. IT'S SO LOUD I FEEL THE BEAT LIKE A PUNCH IN THE CHEST.
NANCY'S GOT THE CROWD WORKED UP TO A NEAR-DROOL.

SHE MAY BE SHOWING OFF EVERYTHING SHE'S GOT IN A JOINT FILLED WITH HORNY DRUNKS, BUT NANCY'S THE SAFEST GAL IN THE WORLD.
EVERYBODY KEEPS THEIR HANDS TO THEMSELVES. THEY KNOW WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU IF YOU DON'T.
I TRY TO BE PATIENT. I TRY NOT TO THINK ABOUT WHAT DAMIEN LORD IS DOING TO AVA, RIGHT NOW.
HOLD ON, BABY. JUST HOLD ON. I'M COMING FOR YOU. I'LL CARRY YOU OUT OF THAT MANSION IF I HAVE TO BURN THE PLACE TO THE GROUND.
BUT I CAN'T DO IT ALONE. I NEED SOMEBODY BIGGER AND MEANER THAN ME TO RUN INTERFERENCE -- AND TO TAKE MANUTE DOWN THE HARD WAY.
I WAS A BIG DEAL!
GLAKK
WELL, WILL YOU LOOK AT WHO'S BACK FROM THE DEAD!
HI, SHELLIE. IT'S BEEN A WHILE.

IT'S BEEN SIX MONTHS, DWIGHT. SIX MONTHS AND NOT SO MUCH AS A LOUSY PHONE CALL.
YEAH, I GUESS I'M A REAL JERK. SORRY.
I WASN'T EXPECTING FLOWERS OR ANYTHING, BUT A PHONE CALL WOULD'VE BEEN NICE. YOUR LOSS, WILD MAN
SORRY. I'M A REAL JERK
CUT OFF?!
IN THIS DIVE?!
I DON'T SEE YOU CUTTING OFF KING KONG OVER THERE!
HE DON'T EVER GET CUT OFF AND WATCH WHAT YOU CALL HIM
IT'S OKAY, JOSIE HE'S FROM OUT OF TOWN. HE DOESN'T KNOW NOTHING.
TELL HER, MAN!
WE'LL BACK YOU UP!
TOURISTS. THIS COULD GET UGLY.

BUDDY, MAYBE YOU OUGHT TO TAKE SOME FRIENDLY ADVICE AND HAUL ON OUT OF HERE YOU'VE HAD A FEW TOO MANY. WE ALL KNOW WHAT THAT'S LIKE. BUT YOU'RE HEADED FOR TROUBLE, MOUTHING OFF LIKE YOU BEEN. GO GET YOURSELF SOME SLEEP.
FLIBO!
WE'LL BACK YOU UP!
TELL HIM OFF!
I'M NOT TAKING ANY ORDERS FROM YOU--OR FROM THAT COW, EITHER, BIG GUY!
MARV'S IN ALTOGETHER TOO GENEROUS A MOOD TONIGHT.
I'LL HAVE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT.
YOU SHOULDN'T OUGHT TO USE LANGUAGE LIKE THAT NOT WHEN IT'S A LADY YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.
"LADY"? I DON'T KNOW. SHE LOOKS MORE LIKE A COW TO ME!

THERE'S NO CALL FOR GETTING NASTY.
IT'S OKAY, MARV STAY OUT OF THIS ONE.
SHE SMELLS LIKE A COW, TOO! BUT MAYBE THAT TURNS A GUY LIKE YOU ON! IF I LOOKED LIKE YOU, I'D SETTLE FOR A COW!
YOU ARE REALLY PUSHING IT.
HELL, I BET COWS ARE GREAT! YOU GET ALL THOSE EXTRA HOOTERS TO PLAY WITH!
YOU BETTER SHUT YOUR TRAP AND GET LOST
SHOW HIM, MAN! SHOW HIM!
I GOT SOMETHING THAT MAKES ME A BIGGER GUY THAN YOU, UGLY!
NOW THAT THERE IS ONE DAMN BIG GUN.
COOL SPEED RIG, TOO. MUST'VE SET YOU BACK A BUNDLE.
I GOT TO TELL YOU, I'M IMPRESSED I REALLY AM.

HE'S BEGGING FOR IT, MAN! BLOW HIM AWAY!
WE'LL BACK YOU UP!
I WILL! I'LL DO IT! I'LL BLOW YOUR DAMN HEAD OFF!
NOW SET 'EM UP, COW!
OKAY. ANOTHER ROUND, ON THE HOUSE. IT'S OKAY, MARV. NO TROUBLE.
YEAH, WE ALL HAVE A FEW TOO MANY SOMETIMES.
IT JUST GETS MY GOAT WHEN GUYS TALK ABOUT DAMES THAT WAY
MOOOOOO
YOU'RE REALLY STARTING TO HONK ME OFF.

Mooooooooo
KRAKK
KRAKK!

BUNCH OF PANSIES...
D:
GET A GOOD START IN THE MORN-ING.
I COULD USE SOME SLEEP.
OWE THE WIFE A CALL
MARV-- I NEED YOUR HELP.
DWIGHT! I DIDN'T EVEN SEE YOU THERE, BUDDY!
WHAT CAN I DO YOU FOR?

IT'S BAD, MARV. IT MEANS GOING UP AGAINST A LOT OF GUNS.
COUNT ME IN. BOY, THAT NANCY SURE IS SOMETHING..
EVERYBODY KEEPS THEIR HANDS TO THEMSELVES THEY'VE SEEN WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU IF YOU DON'T.
NANCY'S GOT A GUARDIAN ANGEL.
SEVEN FEET PLUS OF MUSCLE AND MAYHEM THAT GOES BY THE NAME OF MARV.

MOST PEOPLE THINK MARV IS CRAZY, BUT I DON'T BELIEVE THAT

I'M NO SHRINK AND I'M NOT SAYING I'VE GOT MARV ALL FIGURED OUT OR ANYTHING, BUT "CRAZY" JUST DOESN'T EXPLAIN HIM. NOT TO ME. SOMETIMES I THINK HE'S RETARDED, A BIG, BRUTAL KID WHO NEVER LEARNED THE GROUND RULES ABOUT HOW PEOPLE ARE SUPPOSED TO ACT AROUND EACH OTHER, BUT THAT DOESN'T HAVE THE RIGHT RING TO IT EITHER. NO, IT'S MORE LIKE THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH MARV, NOTHING AT ALL--EXCEPT THAT HE HAD THE ROTTEN LUCK OF BEING BORN AT THE WRONG TIME IN HISTORY HE'D HAVE BEEN OKAY IF HE'D BEEN BORN A COUPLE OF THOUSAND YEARS AGO. HE'D BE RIGHT AT HOME ON SOME ANCIENT BATTLEFIELD, SWINGING AN AX INTO SOMEBODY'S FACE. OR IN A ROMAN ARENA, TAKING A SWORD TO OTHER GLADIATORS LIKE HIM.

THEY'D HAVE TOSSED HIM GIRLS LIKE NANCY, BACK THEN

AND NOW ALL HE CAN DO IS WATCH.

SO WE WATCH NANCY AND WE FINISH OFF THE BOTTLE, LETTING ITS LIQUID DARKNESS FILL US BOTH WHEN I'M SURE HE'S HAD ENOUGH TO MAKE HIM GOOD AND DANGEROUS I TELL HIM ABOUT AVA AND HIS EYES GO KILLER RED I KNOW HE'S WILLING TO DIE FOR ME, IF THAT'S WHAT IT TAKES

THE POOR SLOB I'M USING HIM.

SO I'M USING HIM. SO WHAT? SO HE BREAKS THE FACES I WANT HIM TO BREAK INSTEAD OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S. SO HE HELPS ME GET AVA BACK IN MY ARMS INSTEAD OF SLEEPING IT OFF IN A FLOP-HOUSE OR A GUTTER OR A DRUNK TANK

HIS LIFE ISN'T WORTH A DAMN ANYWAY. IF I DON'T GET HIM KILLED, THE WORLD WILL, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER IT HAS TO KILL HIM. IT'S GOT NO PLACE FOR HIM

THE POOR SLOB.

I HATE MYSELF

CHAPTER FIVE

I'VE NEVER SEEN MARV WITH A GUN BEFORE. THE WAY HE PLAYS WITH IT IS REALLY DISTURBING

I FINALLY REALIZE HOW BEAT UP I AM. SOMEBODY'S TAKEN A POWER SANDER TO THE SKIN OF MY BACK AND WORKED MY KIDNEYS OVER WITH A JACK-HAMMER. MY SPINE IS A TANGLED CHAIN. A BIG, WET BRUISE SQUATS ON MY SKULL WHERE MY FACE OUGHT TO BE. MY TONGUE MOVES ALL ON ITS OWN, PROBING A SORE SPOT TILL A MOLAR COMES LOOSE. I SPIT IT OUT WITH A CHUCKLE AND MARV SHOOTS ME A LOOK, THEN GIVES WITH A CROOKED SMILE, LIKE HE KNOWS HOW I FEEL.

HE'S WRONG ABOUT THAT

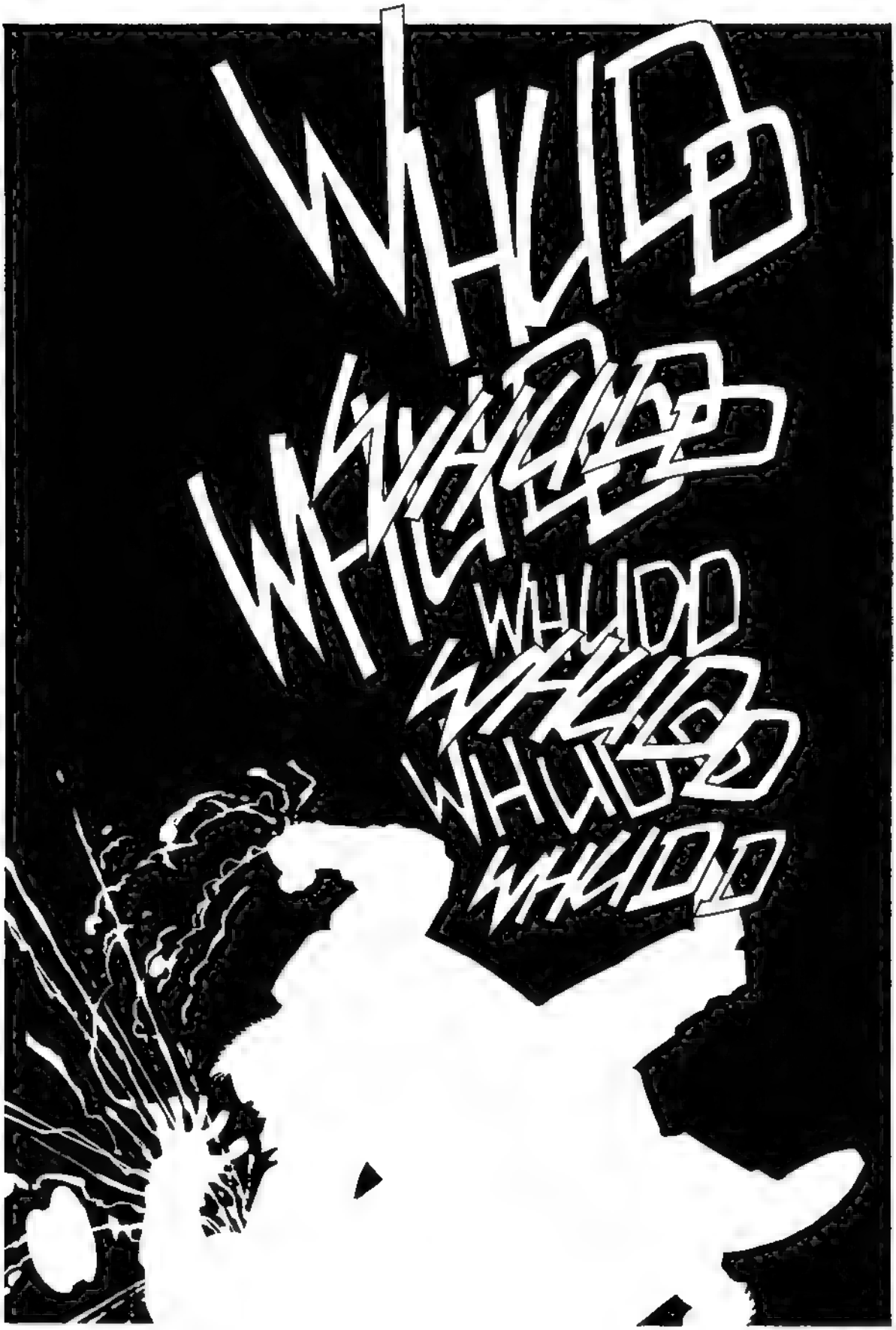
I'M NOT LIKE HIM.

IT DOESN'T TAKE MARV LONG TO GET THEIR ATTENTION.
CRASH!
GRAAA

...YOU!
YOU'RE THE BLIM WHO HURT MY PAL!
BRRKK

CRASH
WHUDD
WHUDD
WHUDD
WHUDD
WHUDD
WHUDD

HEFF
HEFF
HEFF
KHOFF


WHUD
WHUD
WHUD
WHUD
WHUD

DAMIEN LORD.
AVA'S HUSBAND.

WHERE IS SHE? WHERE'S AVA?
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH HER?
I HAVEN'T THE SLIGHTEST NOTION OF WHAT SORT OF NONSENSE MY WIFE HAS FILLED YOUR HEAD WITH, STRANGER -- NOR DO I CARE.
THE WOMAN IS UTTERLY PATH-OLOGICAL...
GET AWAY FROM THAT DESK.
I'M WARNING YOU, MAN. DON'T GIVE ME AN EXCUSE.

BLAM!
THUK!

KRAK!
CRAK

OH, JESUS. OH, JESUS.

I KILLED HIM. OH, JESUS
YOU SURE DID.

I KNEW I COULD COUNT ON YOU. SEX ALWAYS MADE YOU STUPID. READY TO BELIEVE ANYTHING.
AND THAT TEMPER OF YOURS. YOU NEVER COULD CONTROL IT. YOU'VE MURDERED AN INNOCENT MAN, DARLING. AND YOU'VE MADE ME A VERY RICH WOMAN.
THANKS, SUCKER!
BLAM!

AVA.
NO.
BLAM!

I'M AFRAID I'M NOT A TERRIBLY GOOD SHOT. THIS MIGHT TAKE A WHILE. IT'D BE SO MUCH SIMPLER IF MANUTE WERE HERE TO KILL YOU, LIKE HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE. GOODNESS KNOWS WHAT'S KEEPING HIM SWEETHEART-- DO US BOTH A FAVOR AND STAY STILL LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO BLOW YOUR BRAINS OUT.
AVA, YOU CAN'T BE DOING THIS

I CAN DO WHATEVER I WANT, YOU SCHMUCK! I'M IN CHARGE HERE!
"I'M IN CHARGE" --GOD, I'VE WAITED YEARS TO SAY THAT. YEARS. NIGHT AFTER NIGHT, FLAT ON MY BACK, MAKING ALL THE RIGHT NOISES WHILE DAMIEN DID WHAT YOU MEN DO. I WAITED. I PLANNED FOR THE MOMENT I COULD HAVE IT ALL. I KNEW IT WOULD WORK! I KNEW IT!
HUK
HUKK
BLAGG

SORRY TO BE SUCH A CHATTER-BOX. I CAN'T HELP MYSELF. THIS IS SUCH A RARE OPPORTUNITY. I ALMOST NEVER GET THE CHANCE TO STOP ACTING --TO STOP *LYING*. TO LET SOMEBODY SEE THE REAL ME. MAYBE IT'S FOR THE BEST THAT MANUTE DIDN'T SHOW UP, AFTER ALL. IT'S ONLY RIGHT THAT I GET TO SHARE THIS MOMENT WITH YOU
YOU'RE *INSANE!*

INSANE? HA! THAT'S SO *EASY*, SO *CONVENIENT*--AND SO *WRONG*. *CRAZY* PEOPLE PUSH *SHOPPING CARTS* DOWN THE STREETS AND TALK *NONSENSE*. *CRAZY* PEOPLE SIT IN *PADDED CELLS* AND SOIL THEIR *PANTS*. A *MADWOMAN* COULDN'T HAVE PULLED THIS OFF.
NO. THERE'S A WORD FOR WHAT I AM, BUT NOBODY USES IT ANY-MORE. NOBODY WANTS TO SEE THE SIMPLE TRUTH. IF THEY DID, THEY'D KILL PEOPLE LIKE ME AS SOON AS WE REVEALED OURSELVES.

BUT THEY DON'T. THEY CLOSE THEIR EYES AND BLATHER ABOUT *PSYCHOLOGY* AND SAY *NOBODY* IS TRULY *EVIL*. THAT'S WHY I'VE *WON*. THAT'S WHY I *ALWAYS* WIN

BLAM!
THANKS FOR LISTENING TO ALL THAT, HONEY
BAM!
?

BLAM!
KA-THUD
THUMP
THUMP
THUMP
THUMP

THUD
BAM!
BLAM!
SPAK

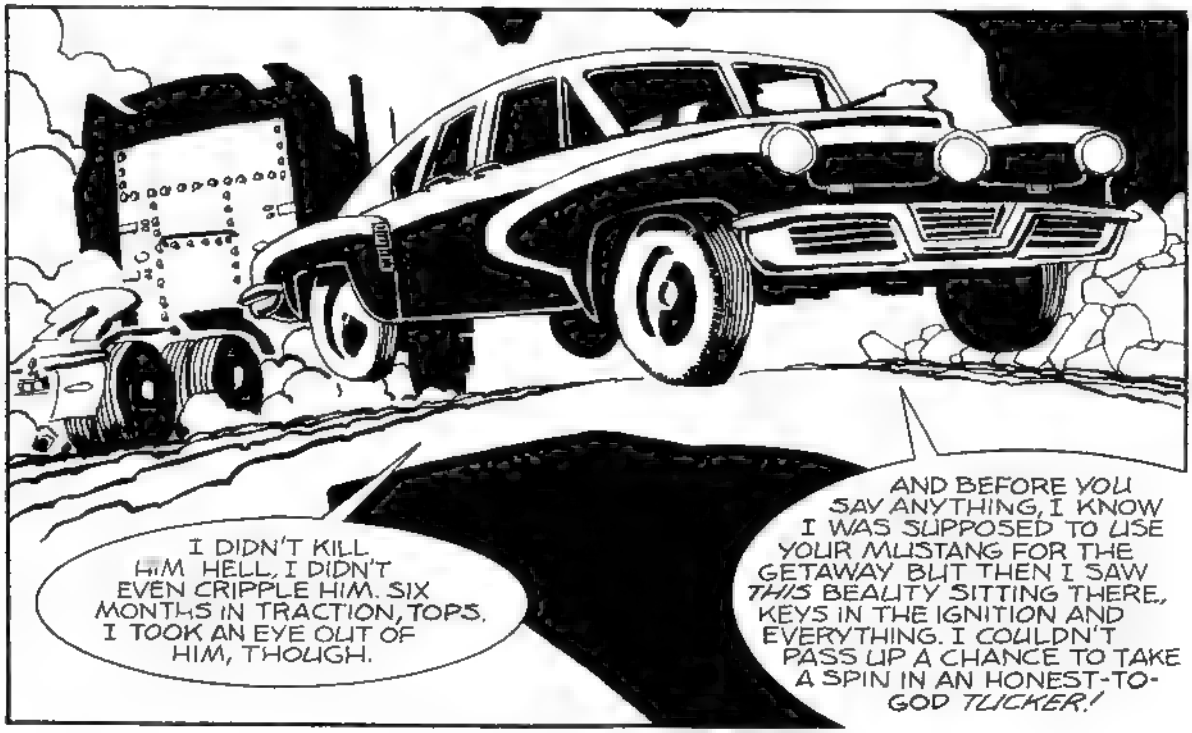
CLICK
CLICK
CLICK
DAMN!
HMM...
OH, OFFICER... I WAS SO TERRIFIED.. THERE WAS BLOOD EVERY-WHERE!... "BLOOD EVERYWHERE" ..THAT'S GOOD..

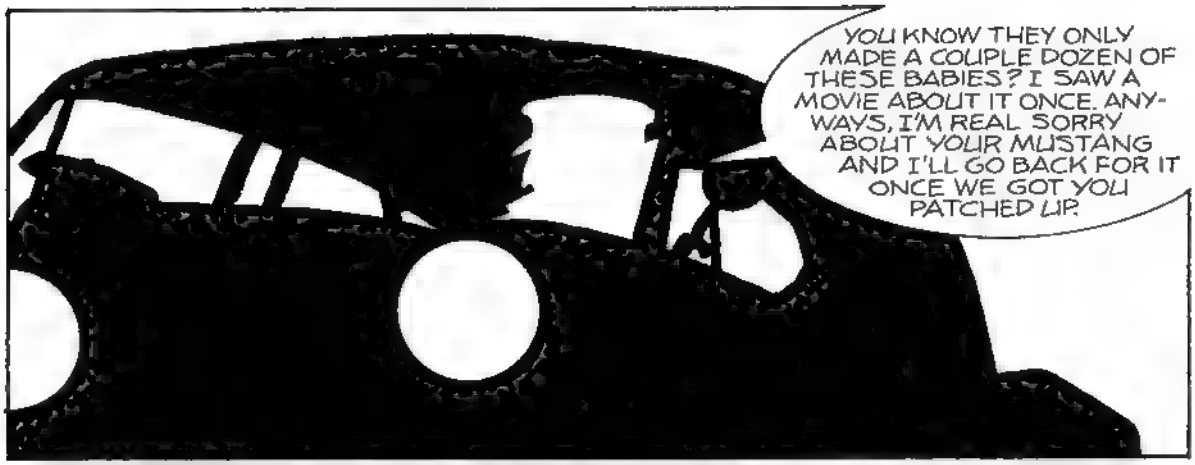
IS THIS THE POLICE? OH, GOD! IT'S HORRIBLE! COME QUICKLY! IT'S HORRIBLE! THERE'S BLOOD EVERY-WHERE! I THINK HE'S DEAD!
MY HUSBAND! HE'S NOT MOVING! I HEARD GUNSHOTS! AND DWIGHT WAS BEATING HIM! HE WOULDN'T STOP! THERE'S BLOOD EVERYWHERE!

I'M SORRY! I'LL TRY TO MAKE SENSE! I'M AVA LORD! IT'S MY HUS-BAND! DAMIEN! THAT'S RIGHT! DAMIEN LORD!
YES! I SAW HIM! IT WAS DWIGHT! DWIGHT McCARTHY! HE'S CRAZY! CRAZY! HE'S BEEN MAKING THREATS! AND NOW THERE'S BLOOD EVERYWHERE! PLEASE HURRY!
TIK!
THE RICHEST WOMAN IN SIN CITY...

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

HONK
I HANDLED THAT BIG GUY JUST LIKE I PROMISED, DWIGHT.
LUNATIC!


I DIDN'T KILL HIM. HELL, I DIDN'T EVEN CRIPPLE HIM. SIX MONTHS IN TRACTION, TOPS. I TOOK AN EYE OUT OF HIM, THOUGH.
AND BEFORE YOU SAY ANYTHING, I KNOW I WAS SUPPOSED TO USE YOUR MUSTANG FOR THE GETAWAY BUT THEN I SAW THIS BEAUTY SITTING THERE, KEYS IN THE IGNITION AND EVERYTHING. I COULDN'T PASS UP A CHANCE TO TAKE A SPIN IN AN HONEST-TO-GOD TUCKER!


YOU KNOW THEY ONLY MADE A COUPLE DOZEN OF THESE BABIES? I SAW A MOVIE ABOUT IT ONCE. ANYWAYS, I'M REAL SORRY ABOUT YOUR MUSTANG AND I'LL GO BACK FOR IT ONCE WE GOT YOU PATCHED UP.

NEVER MIND ABOUT MY CAR, MARV. JUST GET ME TO OLD TOWN. I GOT FRIENDS THERE. AND COULD YOU TURN THAT RADIO DOWN?
YOU *KIDDING?* THAT'S *MERLE! MERLE HAGGARD!* THE GREATEST COUNTRY SINGER THERE EVER *WAS!*

I'M QUAKING COLD FROM HEAD TO TOE. ALL MY WARMTH SQUIRTS OUT OF ME, KEEPING PERFECT TIME WITH MY HEARTBEAT. ONE OF MY LUNGS SUCKS AIR THROUGH A HOLE IN MY CHEST EVERY TIME I LOOSEN MY GRIP ON IT.

I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER BEEN SHOT UP AS BAD AS THIS BEFORE.

I'M A JERK AND AN IDIOT AND A MURDERER ON MY WAY TO BECOMING A CORPSE, AND MARV IS TALKING ABOUT MERLE HAGGARD.

...I THOUGHT OLD MERLE HAD LOST IT, FOR A FEW YEARS THERE GONE ALL *SQUISHY*, SINGING CRAP LIKE *"YOU PUT ME ON A NATURAL HIGH."* I COULDN'T *BELIEVE* IT WHEN HE SANG THAT ONE.
I MEAN, WHAT'S NEXT, MERLE? *"YOU LIGHT UP MY LIFE"?* CHRIST.

KLUMP
!
...BUT THIS NEW TUNE..
EEEE
...THIS "ME AND CRIPPLED SOLDIERS," THIS IS AS GOOD AS HE EVER WAS. JUST SHOWS TO GO YOU. YOU NEVER CAN TELL.
SORRY...
E
EE
PULL OVER!
...HERE I AM JABBERING, WITH YOU LEAKING ALL OVER THE PLACE YOU'RE DAMN LUCKY ALL THAT DAME HAD WAS A .32 ...

OF!
...WE WOULDN'T EVEN BE HAVING THIS CONVERSATION IF SHE'D USED A REAL GUN ON YOU. EVEN SO, GETTING SHOT IN THE FACE ISN'T HIGH ON MY LIST OF HOW TO HAVE A GOOD TIME.
JUST HOLD ON. I'LL GET YOU TO A GUY I KNOW.
YAAAA
KLINK
HE'S GOOD WITH BULLETS AND HE DON'T ASK QUESTIONS.
NO OLD TOWN TAKE ME TO OLD TOWN.
LET ME LEVEL WITH YOU, PAL. I KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT THESE THINGS AND YOU AIN'T GOING TO MAKE IT TO OLD TOWN. THAT'S A GOOD TWENTY MINUTES AWAY AND YOU'RE ABOUT TEN MINUTES FROM BEING DEAD.

I'LL MAKE IT. I WON'T DIE. I'VE GOT TOO MUCH I HAVE TO DO TO LET MYSELF DIE.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT HE'S CAPABLE OF! THE THINGS HE SAID! EVEN WHILE HE WAS BEATING THE LIFE OUT OF POOR, DEAR DAMIEN--HE KEPT TELLING ME WHAT HE WAS GOING TO DO TO ME!
I DON'T KNOW WHERE I FOUND THE COURAGE TO GRAB THE GUN--I FIRED AND FIRED--BUT HE LAUGHED! HE JUST KEPT LAUGHING!

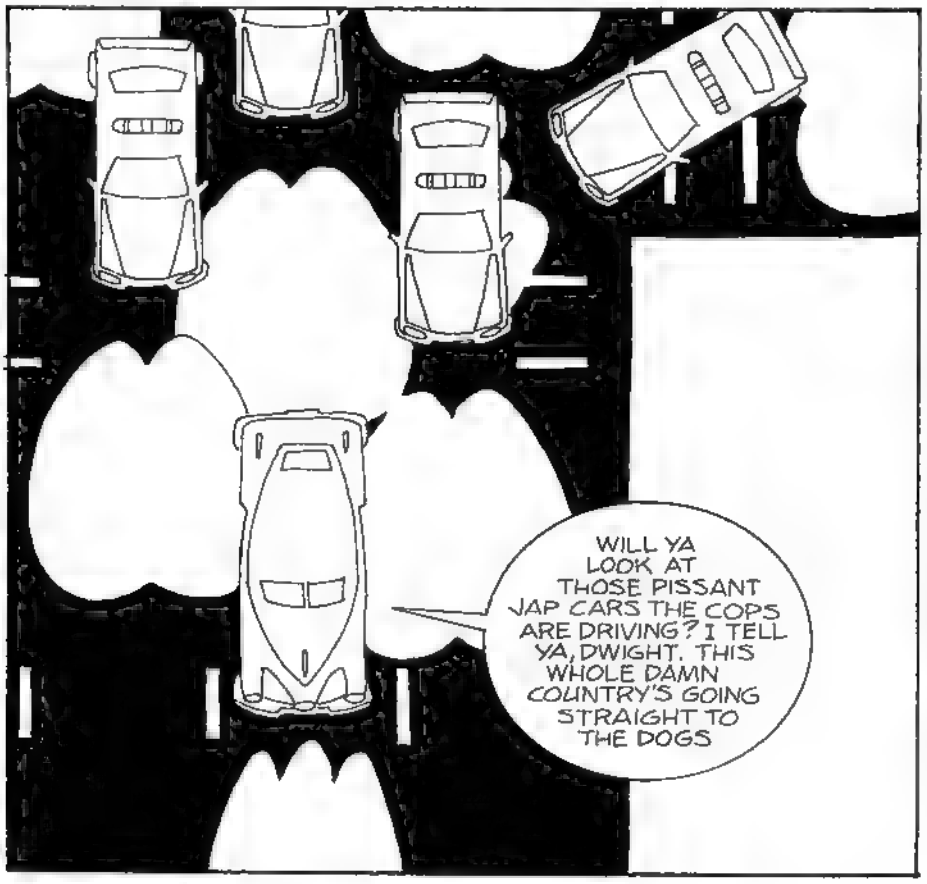
HE LEFT A LOT OF BLOOD, MRS LORD HE WON'T GET FAR
I KNOW IT'S DIFFICULT, BUT PLEASE TRY TO STAY CALM YOU SAID YOU KNEW HIM...
I'M SORRY, LIEUTENANT. YOU'VE BEEN SO VERY PATIENT WITH ME HERE WE'VE BARELY MET, BUT ALREADY I FEEL I CAN TRUST YOU
THE KILLER'S NAME IS DWIGHT McCARTHY. WE WERE... TOGETHER, FOR A TIME, A FEW YEARS AGO...

...HE STARTED IMAGINING THINGS FOLLOWING ME, WHEREVER I WENT.
THERE WAS A CAT I HAD A BURMESE NAMED MUFFIN I LOVED THAT CAT BUT TO DWIGHT SHE WAS JUST ANOTHER THING TO BE JEALOUS ABOUT ANOTHER THREAT HE CUT HER EYES OUT HE SAID HE'D DO THE SAME THING TO ME.
I RAN AWAY. I MET DAMIEN. I THOUGHT I WAS SAFE BUT THEN HE STARTED CALLING. LATE AT NIGHT ALWAYS AT NIGHT. AND NOW--NOW DAMIEN'S DEAD AND...OH, PLEASE, LIEUTENANT. HOLD ME. HOLD ME TIGHT. JUST FOR A MOMENT...
NOTHING LIKE A WIDOW IN NEED OF COMFORT. I GOT A STIFFY JUST WATCHING. IF YOU'RE NOT A COMPLETE DOPE, YOU'LL BE CHECKING BACK ON THAT ONE.
I'M A MARRIED MAN, BOB.
NO DISRESPECT TO THE LITTLE WOMAN, MORT, BUT YOU DON'T PASS UP A CHANCE LIKE THAT! WHAT'S THE POINT OF BEING A SIN CITY COP IF YOU DON'T GET ANY USE OUT OF THE PERKS?
THAT'S ENOUGH, BOB. YOU SHUT THE HELL UP.

WE'RE CUTTING THROUGH LITTLE SAIGON WHEN A POLICE CHOPPER SPOTS US. MARV HOLDS A CLINIC ON EVASIVE DRIVING AND CASUAL PROPERTY DAMAGE. I HOLD MY GUTS IN AND DO MY BEST TO STAY CONSCIOUS THINKING ABOUT AVA HELPS.

AVA.

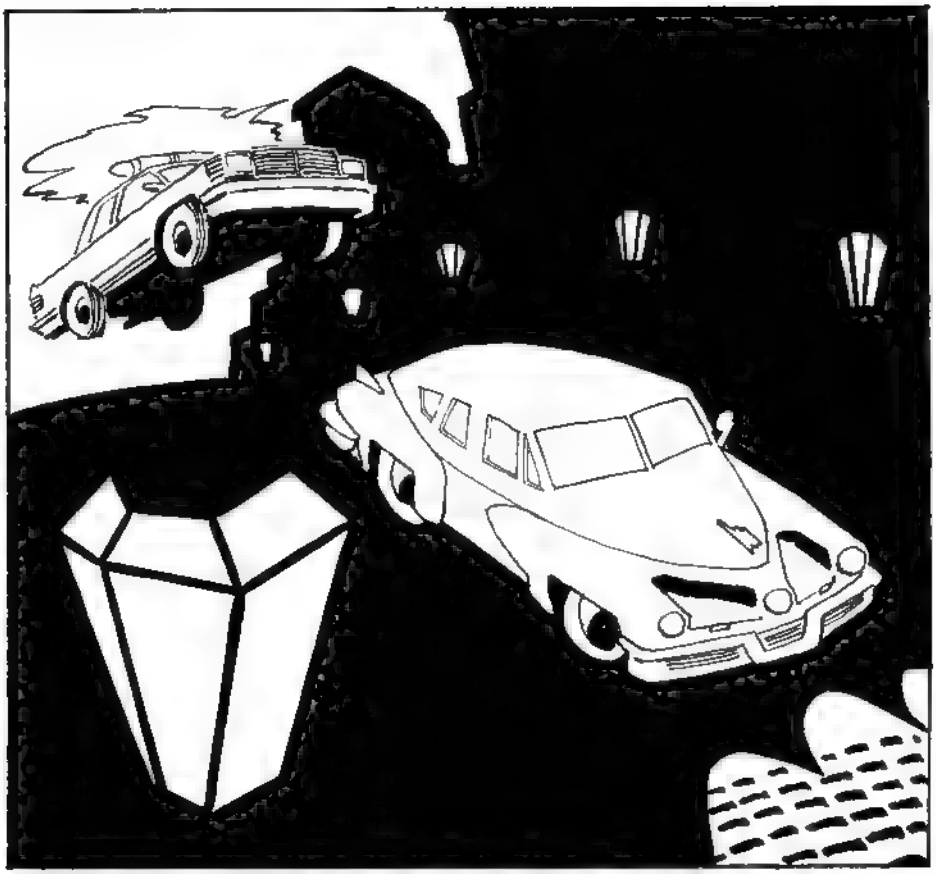
YOU GOT ME GOOD, BABE. JUST WHEN I WAS PULLING IT BACK TOGETHER YOU COME ALONG AND RIP MY HEART OUT ONE MORE TIME. ONLY THIS TIME YOU CROSSED A FINAL, FATAL LINE. YOU TRICKED ME INTO DOING SOMETHING THERE'S NO COMING BACK FROM. YOU'VE DAMNED MY SOUL TO HELL.


WILL YA LOOK AT THOSE PISSANT JAP CARS THE COPS ARE DRIVING? I TELL YA, DWIGHT. THIS WHOLE DAMN COUNTRY'S GOING STRAIGHT TO THE DOGS

THEN THE MAYBES KICK IN. MAYBE I SHOULDN'T PUT THE BLAME ON YOU. MAYBE ONCE I LET THE MONSTER OUT SOMETHING BAD WAS SURE TO HAPPEN, JUST LIKE IT ALWAYS HAS. MAYBE A KILLER'S A KILLER AND I WAS JUST BORN THAT WAY. MAYBE ALL YOU DID WAS GIVE ME A TARGET.

MAYBE. BUT I'M GOING TO GO AHEAD AND BLAME YOU ANYWAY. I HAVE TO BLAME YOU. HATE'S THE ONLY THING KEEPING ME GOING SO I'M HOLDING ON TO IT.

I CAN'T SEEM TO GET ANY AIR IN. I'M GULPING A LOT. IT SOUNDS AWFUL.

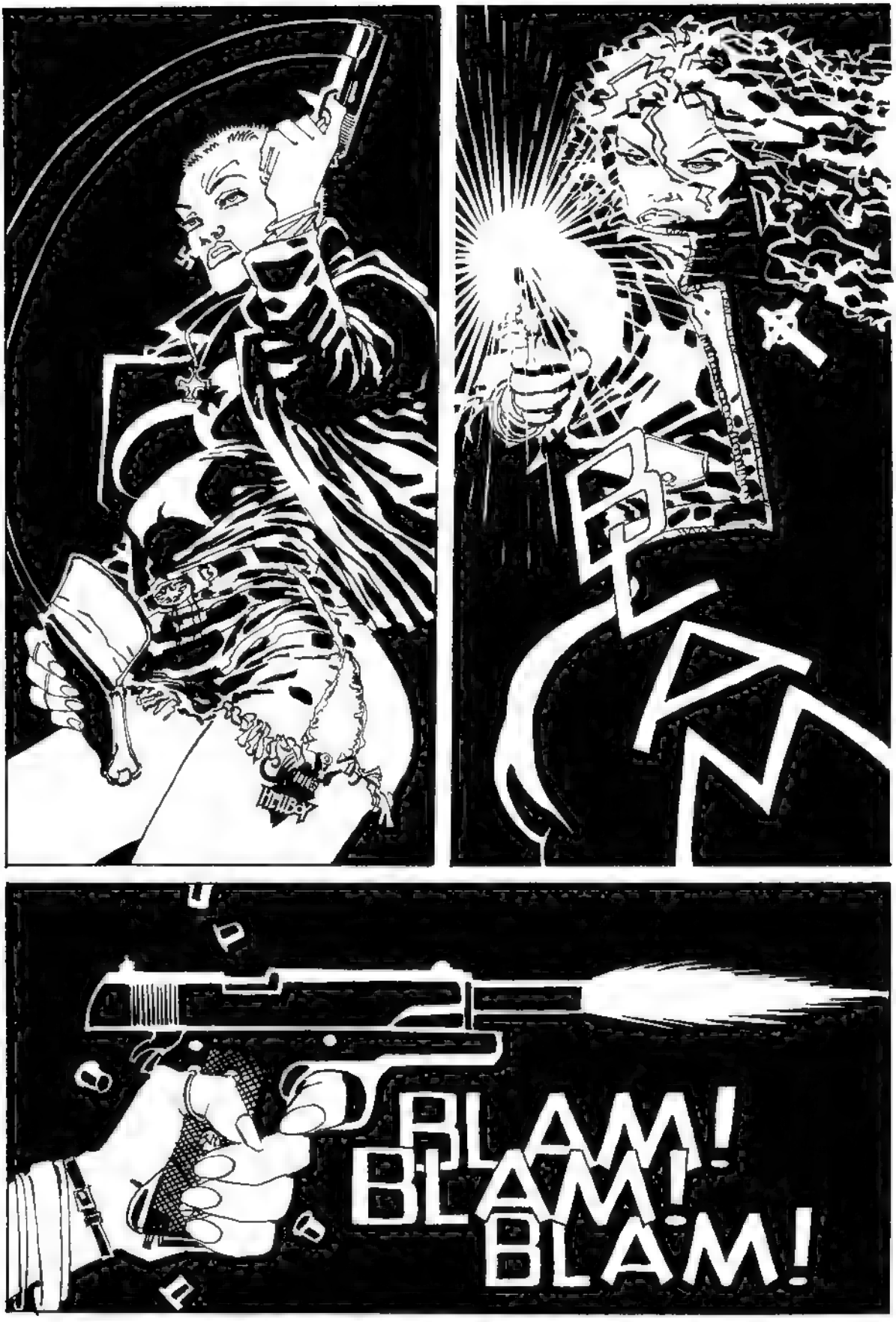


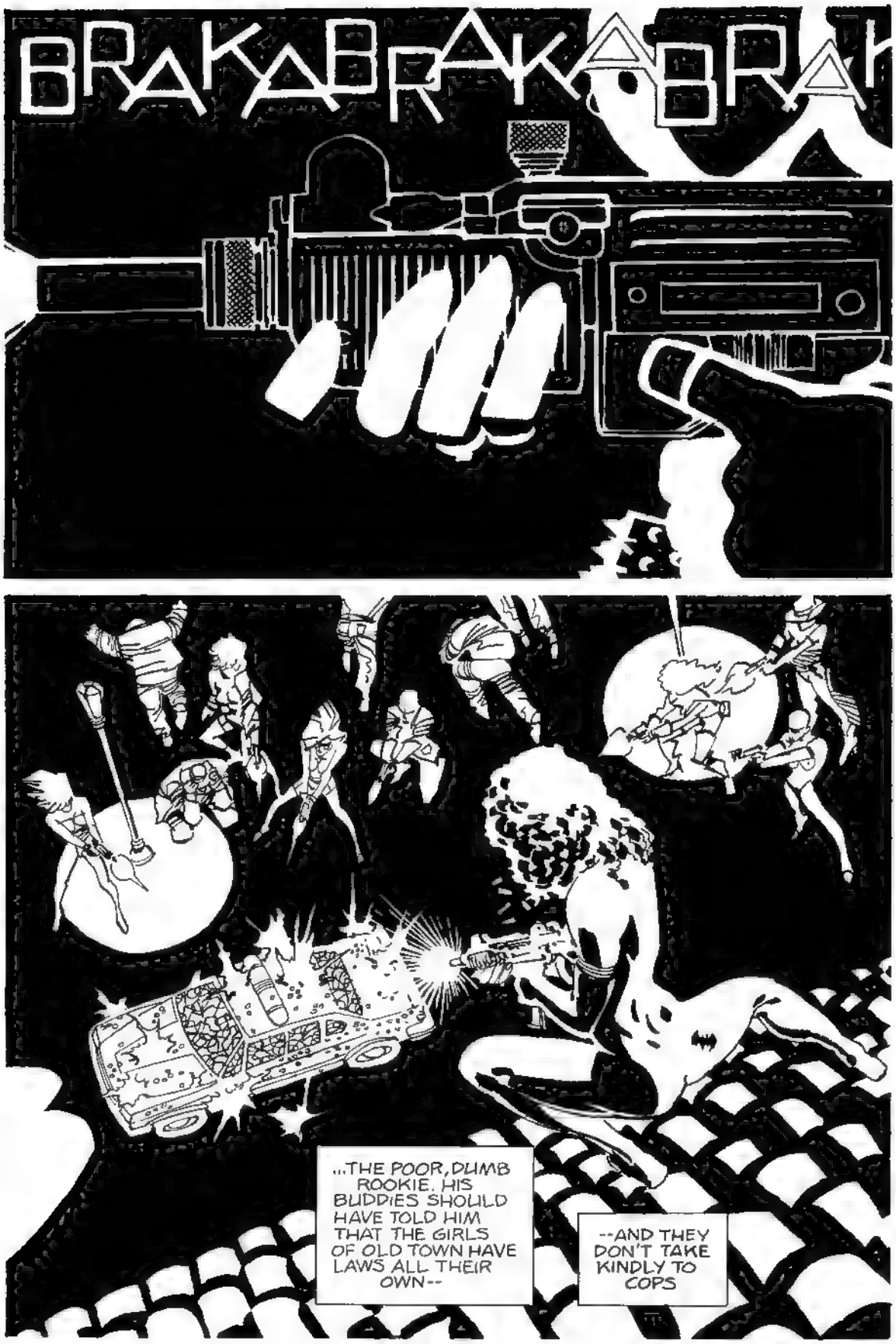
PAVEMENT GIVES WAY TO COBBLE-STONE. THE CITY'S NOISE RECEDES. WE'RE IN A QUIET NEIGHBORHOOD, WHERE ALL THE SOUNDS OF PASSION AND VIOLENCE ARE LOCKED AWAY BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.

OLD TOWN.

IT'S HARDER THAN EVER TO BREATHE. I CAN'T SLOW MY HEART DOWN. THIS DOESN'T LOOK GOOD

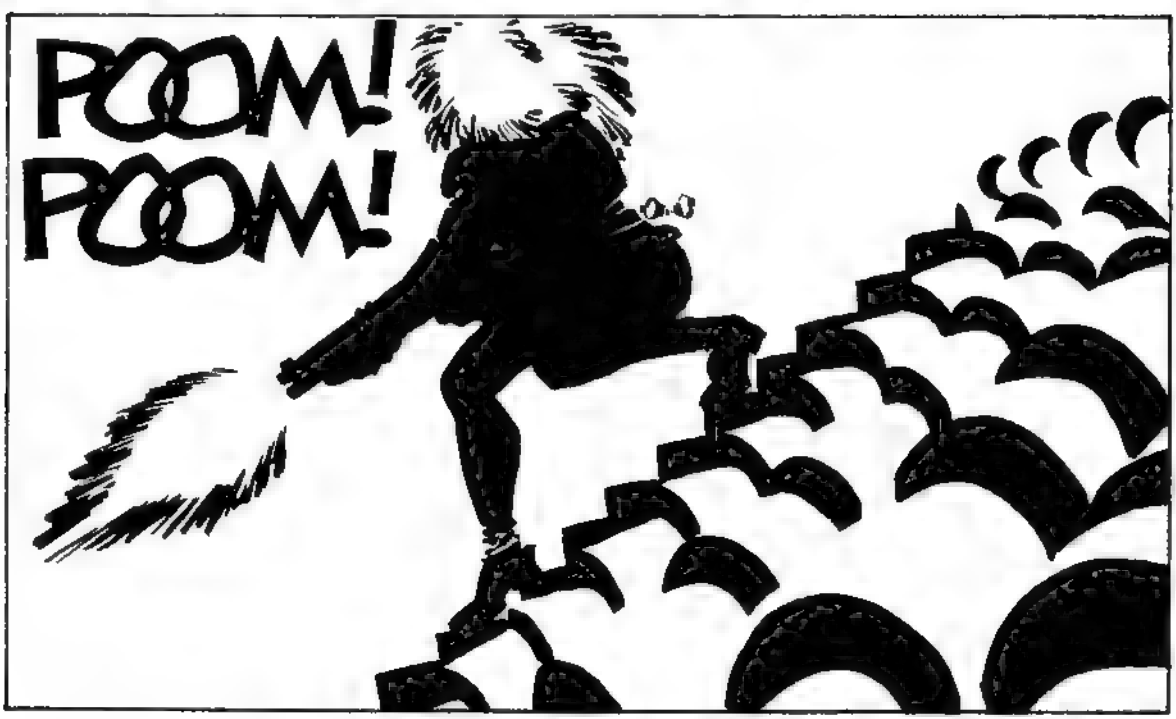
ONE SQUAD CAR STILL CHASES US. MUST BE A ROOKIE DRIVING. OTHER-WISE HE WOULD'VE KNOWN TO BACK OFF. THE POOR BASTARD...

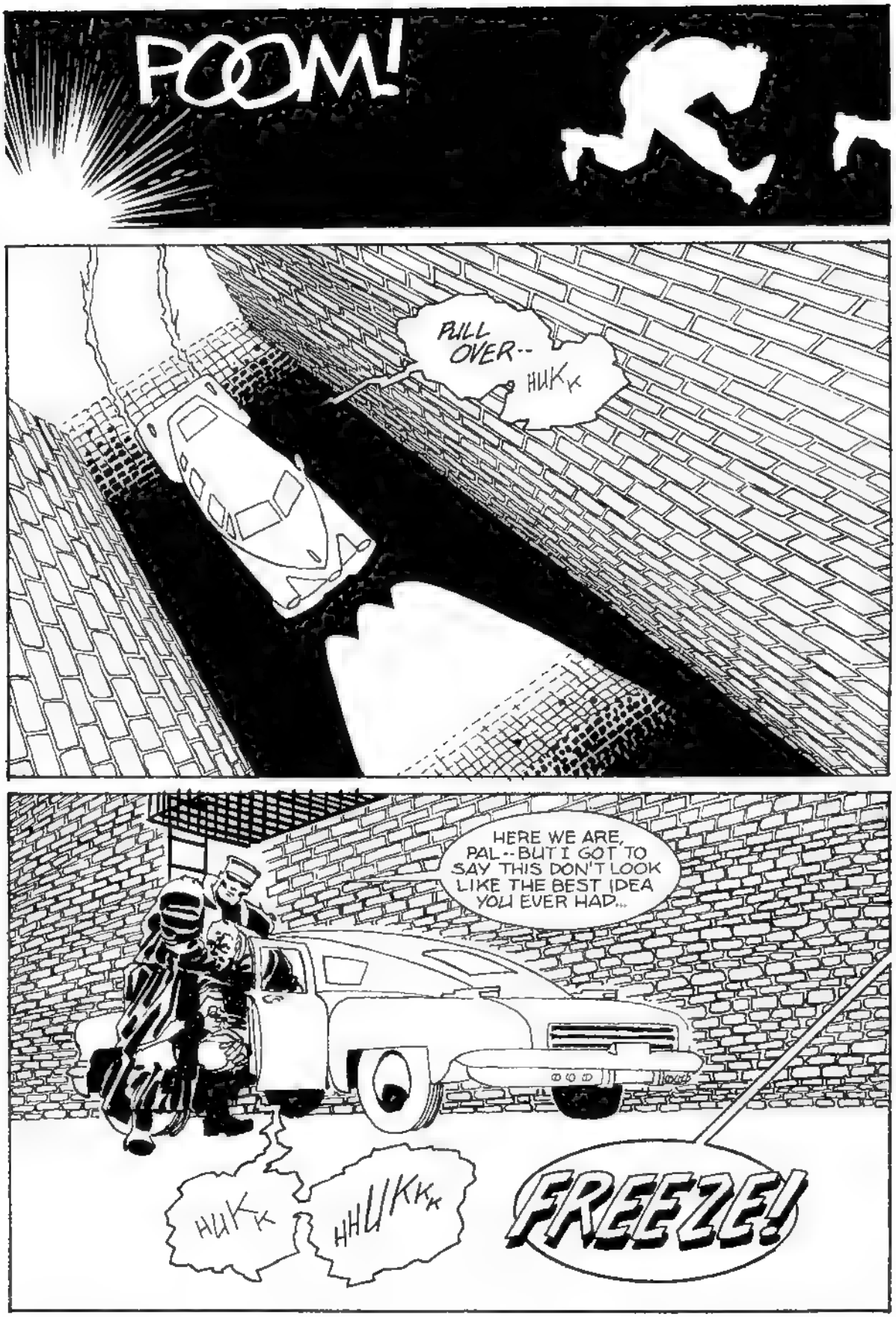

KILLBOY
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!


BRAKABRAKABRAK
...THE POOR, DUMB ROOKIE. HIS BUDDIES SHOULD HAVE TOLD HIM THAT THE GIRLS OF OLD TOWN HAVE LAWS ALL THEIR OWN--
--AND THEY DON'T TAKE KINDLY TO COPS

HAW!
THIS IS GREAT!
YOU'RE A GENIUS, KID!

BRAKABRAKA BLAM BLAM
BLAM
BUDDA BLAM
BRAKA BLAM


POOM!
POOM!


POOM!
PULL OVER--
HUK K
HERE WE ARE, PAL--BUT I GOT TO SAY THIS DON'T LOOK LIKE THE BEST IDEA YOU EVER HAD...
HUK K
HHUKK K
FREEZE!

YOU BOYS HAVE TEN SECONDS TO TELL US WHAT YOU'RE DOING BRINGING COPS TO OLD TOWN THEN THINGS GET NASTY

WE GOT US A PROBLEM, DWIGHT. I DON'T FIGHT GIRLS
HLKK
GAIL-- IT'S ME--
DWIGHT
OH, BABY. WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO YOU?
HUK K

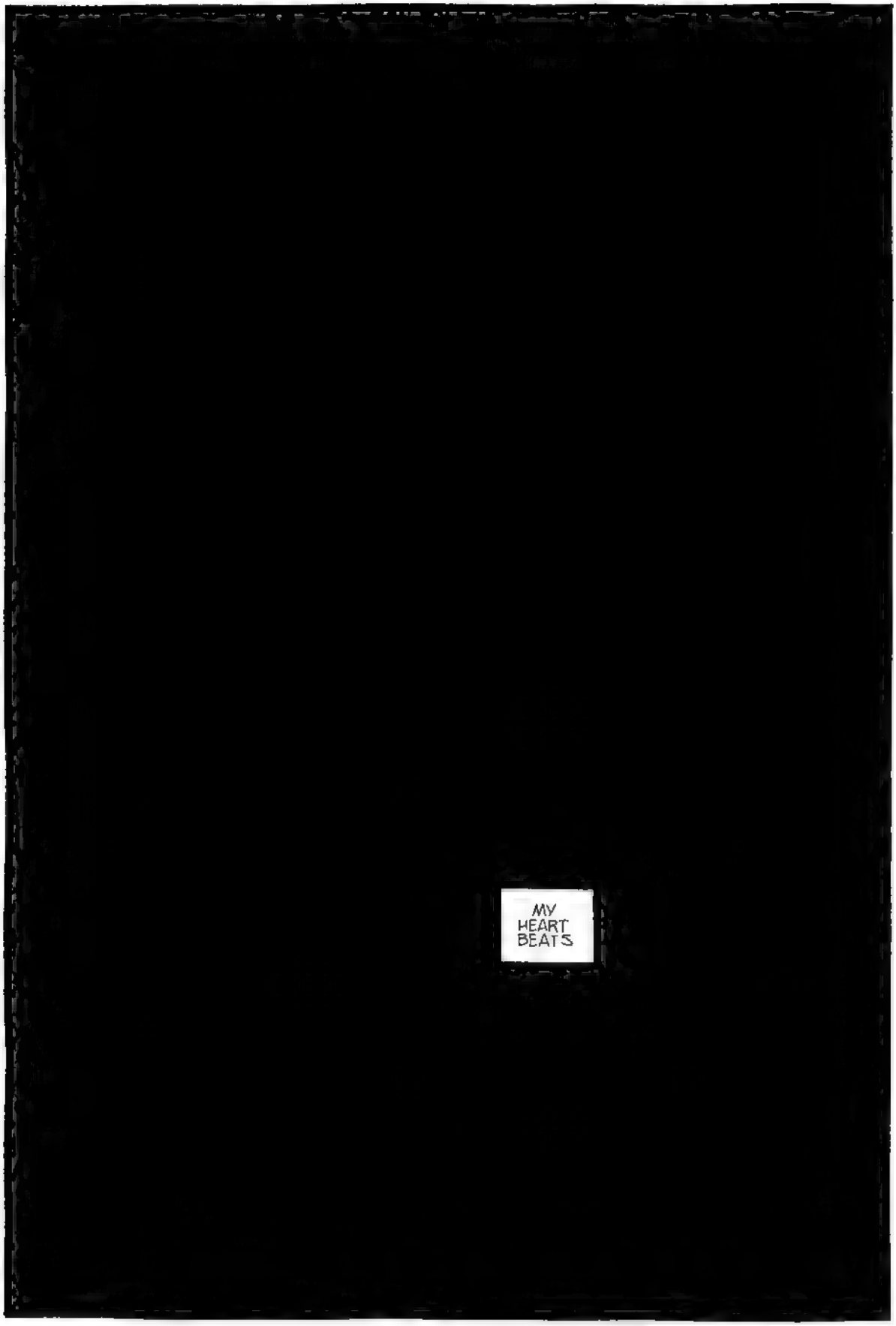
A CORKSCREW STABS ME SQUARE IN THE CHEST -- AND TWISTS.

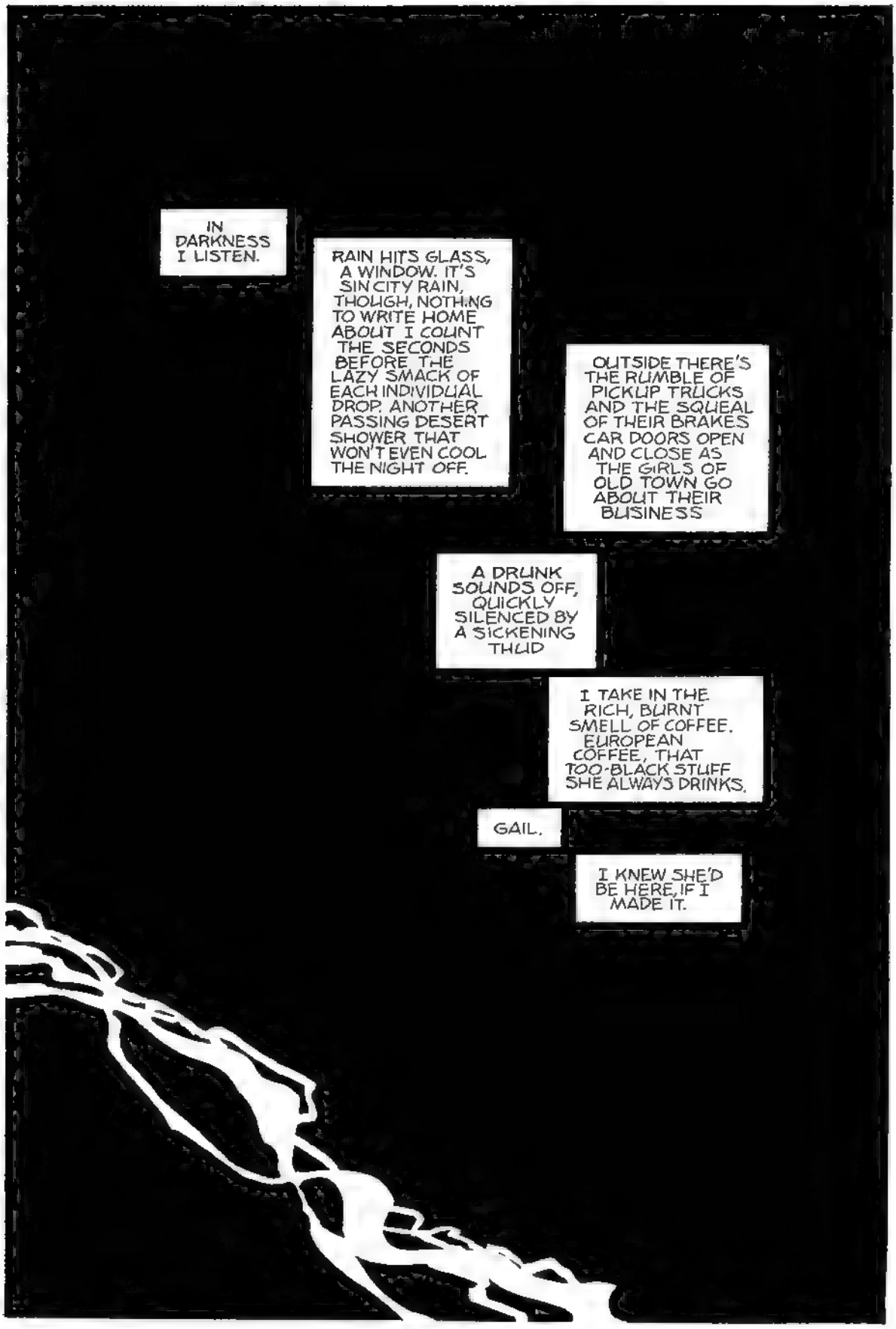
IT'S HIS HEART! GET MOLLY!

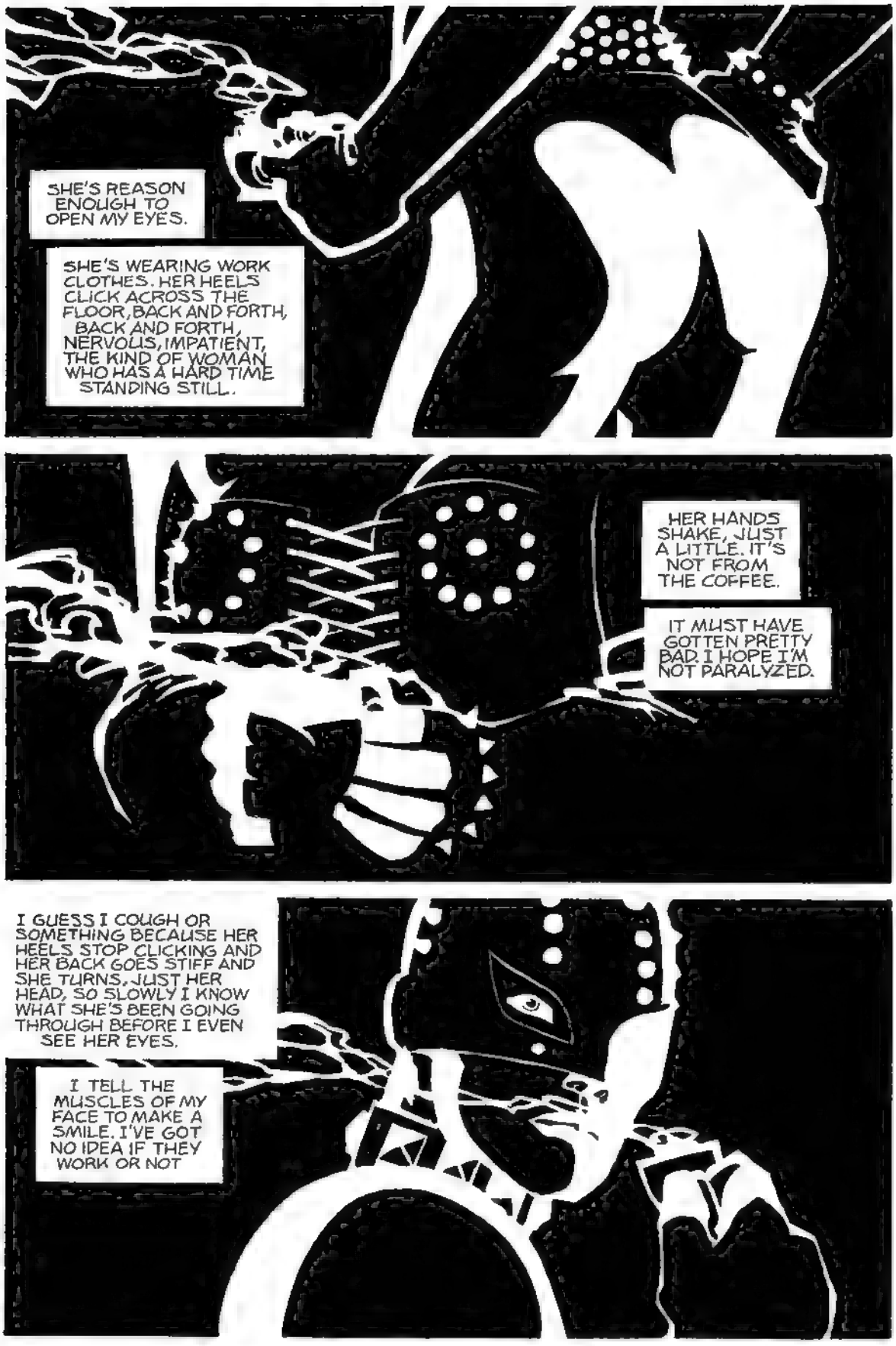
BRIING!
IT'S ABOUT TIME...

LIEUTENANT YOU'RE SO KIND TO CALL
...NO, I WASN'T SLEEPING I HAVEN'T SLEPT AT ALL. NOT FOR TWO DAYS. I'M JUST FRANTIC. I'M JUMPING AT EVERY SOUND--JUST KNOWING HE'S STILL OUT THERE. I GUESS I'M NOT A VERY STRONG PERSON
YOU SHOULDN'T BE SO HARD ON YOURSELF, MRS LORD
YOU'RE HAVING A VERY UNDERSTANDABLE REACTION PLEASE, IF THERE'S ANYTHING AT ALL I CAN DO FOR YOU...
I HATE MYSELF FOR SAYING THIS, BUT--NO NO, I COULDN'T ASK...
...WELL... OH, GOD, I'M SO WEAK...
...IT'S JUST THAT I DON'T KNOW IF I COULD BEAR TO BE ALONE TONIGHT...

CHAPTER SEVEN

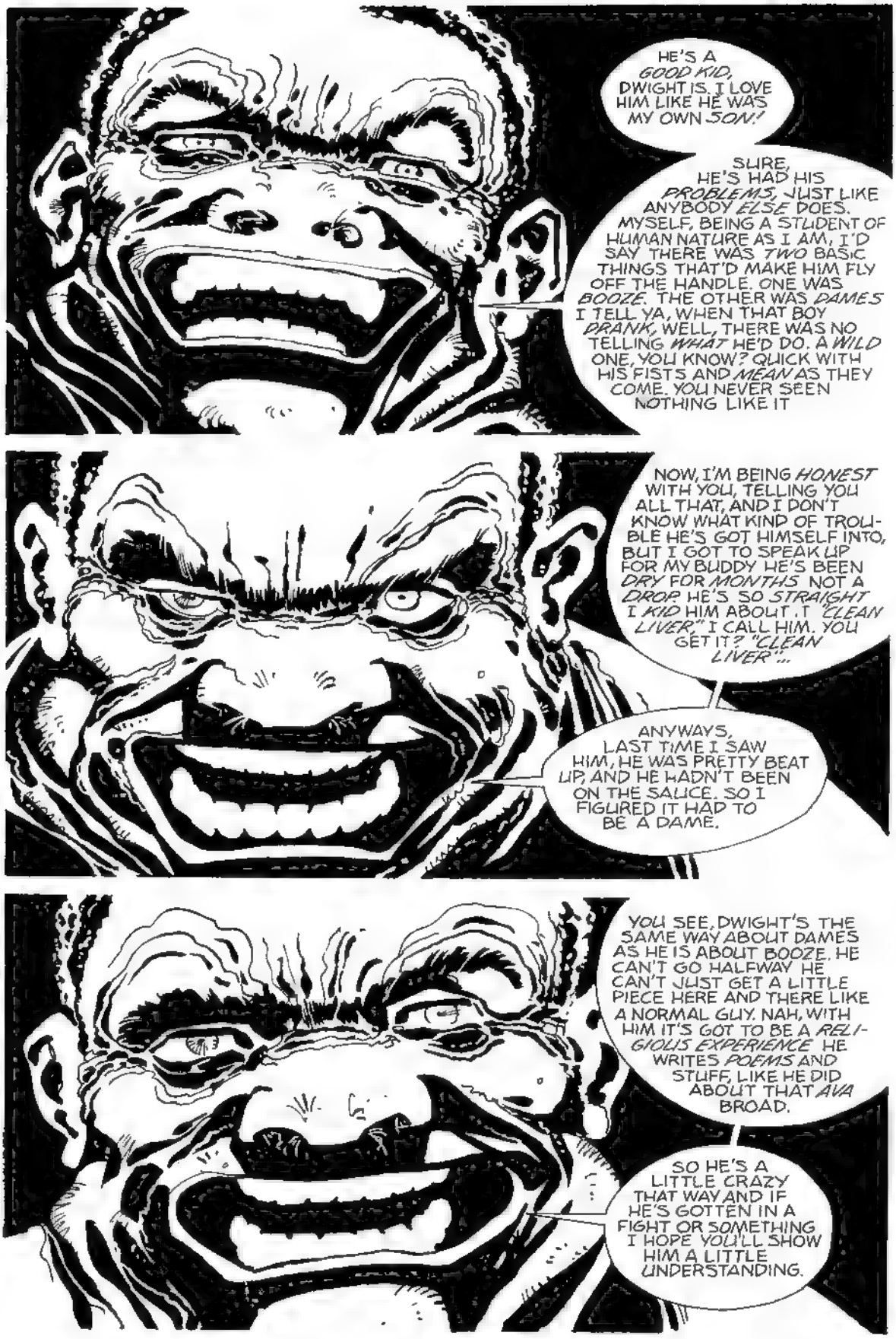

MY
HEART
BEATS


IN DARKNESS I LISTEN.
RAIN HITS GLASS, A WINDOW. IT'S SIN CITY RAIN, THOUGH, NOTHING TO WRITE HOME ABOUT. I COUNT THE SECONDS BEFORE THE LAZY SMACK OF EACH INDIVIDUAL DROP. ANOTHER PASSING DESERT SHOWER THAT WON'T EVEN COOL THE NIGHT OFF.
OUTSIDE THERE'S THE RUMBLE OF PICKUP TRUCKS AND THE SQUEAL OF THEIR BRAKES. CAR DOORS OPEN AND CLOSE AS THE GIRLS OF OLD TOWN GO ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS.
A DRUNK SOUNDS OFF, QUICKLY SILENCED BY A SICKENING THUD.
I TAKE IN THE RICH, BURNT SMELL OF COFFEE. EUROPEAN COFFEE, THAT TOO-BLACK STUFF SHE ALWAYS DRINKS.
GAIL.
I KNEW SHE'D BE HERE, IF I MADE IT.


SHE'S REASON ENOUGH TO OPEN MY EYES.
SHE'S WEARING WORK CLOTHES. HER HEELS CLICK ACROSS THE FLOOR, BACK AND FORTH, BACK AND FORTH, NERVOUS, IMPATIENT, THE KIND OF WOMAN WHO HAS A HARD TIME STANDING STILL.
HER HANDS SHAKE, JUST A LITTLE. IT'S NOT FROM THE COFFEE.
IT MUST HAVE GOTTEN PRETTY BAD. I HOPE I'M NOT PARALYZED.
I GUESS I COUGH OR SOMETHING BECAUSE HER HEELS STOP CLICKING AND HER BACK GOES STIFF AND SHE TURNS, JUST HER HEAD, SO SLOWLY I KNOW WHAT SHE'S BEEN GOING THROUGH BEFORE I EVEN SEE HER EYES.
I TELL THE MUSCLES OF MY FACE TO MAKE A SMILE. I'VE GOT NO IDEA IF THEY WORK OR NOT

CAN YOU HEAR ME, DWIGHT? BLINK YOUR EYES IF YOU CAN HEAR ME... THAT'S GOOD. DON'T TRY TO TALK... YOU'RE GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT, BABY BUT IT GOT ABOUT AS CLOSE AS IT CAN GET. I WAS SURE YOU WERE DEAD. ONE OF THE BULLETS HIT A PULMONARY ARTERY. YOU WENT INTO CARDIAC ARREST. MOLLY HAD TO CRACK YOUR CHEST OPEN AND REACH RIGHT INSIDE YOU AND MASSAGE YOUR HEART
NO, BABY DON'T TRY TO TALK. THE MASK?..
FUNNY. I DIDN'T REALIZE I WAS STILL WEARING IT. I GUESS I'M TIRED. THE TWINS HAVE BEEN WORKING US PRETTY HARD. A COUPLE OF GIRLS HAVE VANISHED. WE'VE BEEN WORKING SIXTEEN-HOUR SHIFTS, BUT WE HAVEN'T A CLUE. IT'S GOT EVERYBODY ON EDGE
THE TWINS... THAT'S RIGHT, YOU WOULDN'T KNOW THEM. THEY ONLY TOOK CHARGE A FEW WEEKS AGO
I'M AFRAID YOU'LL BE MEETING THEM, BEFORE LONG. THE COPS WANT YOU PRETTY BADLY. BUT DON'T WORRY. WE'LL FIGURE SOMETHING OUT.
AND WE'LL FIX YOU UP AND GET YOU ON YOUR FEET SO I CAN DECK YOU FOR LEAVING IN THE FIRST PLACE.

MY WARRIOR WOMAN GOES ALL SOFT, SOBBING. "I TOLD YOU YOU'D BE BACK," SHE CROAKS, "I TOLD YOU YOU BELONG HERE, YOU JERK."
I WAS A FOOL. I THOUGHT THERE WAS A BETTER WORLD OUT THERE I THOUGHT I COULD BE A PART OF IT
I WAS WRONG BOTH TIMES.


HE'S A GOOD KID, DWIGHT IS. I LOVE HIM LIKE HE WAS MY OWN SON!
SURE, HE'S HAD HIS PROBLEMS, JUST LIKE ANYBODY ELSE DOES. MYSELF, BEING A STUDENT OF HUMAN NATURE AS I AM, I'D SAY THERE WAS TWO BASIC THINGS THAT'D MAKE HIM FLY OFF THE HANDLE. ONE WAS BOOZE. THE OTHER WAS DAMES I TELL YA, WHEN THAT BOY DRANK, WELL, THERE WAS NO TELLING WHAT HE'D DO. A WILD ONE, YOU KNOW? QUICK WITH HIS FISTS AND MEAN AS THEY COME. YOU NEVER SEEN NOTHING LIKE IT
NOW, I'M BEING HONEST WITH YOU, TELLING YOU ALL THAT, AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT KIND OF TROUBLE HE'S GOT HIMSELF INTO, BUT I GOT TO SPEAK UP FOR MY BUDDY HE'S BEEN DRY FOR MONTHS NOT A DROP HE'S SO STRAIGHT I KID HIM ABOUT IT "CLEAN LIVER," I CALL HIM. YOU GET IT? "CLEAN LIVER"...
ANYWAYS, LAST TIME I SAW HIM, HE WAS PRETTY BEAT UP, AND HE HADN'T BEEN ON THE SAUCE. SO I FIGURED IT HAD TO BE A DAME.
YOU SEE, DWIGHT'S THE SAME WAY ABOUT DAMES AS HE IS ABOUT BOOZE. HE CAN'T GO HALFWAY HE CAN'T JUST GET A LITTLE PIECE HERE AND THERE LIKE A NORMAL GUY. NAH, WITH HIM IT'S GOT TO BE A RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE HE WRITES POEMS AND STUFF, LIKE HE DID ABOUT THAT AVA BROAD.
SO HE'S A LITTLE CRAZY THAT WAY AND IF HE'S GOTTEN IN A FIGHT OR SOMETHING I HOPE YOU'LL SHOW HIM A LITTLE UNDERSTANDING.

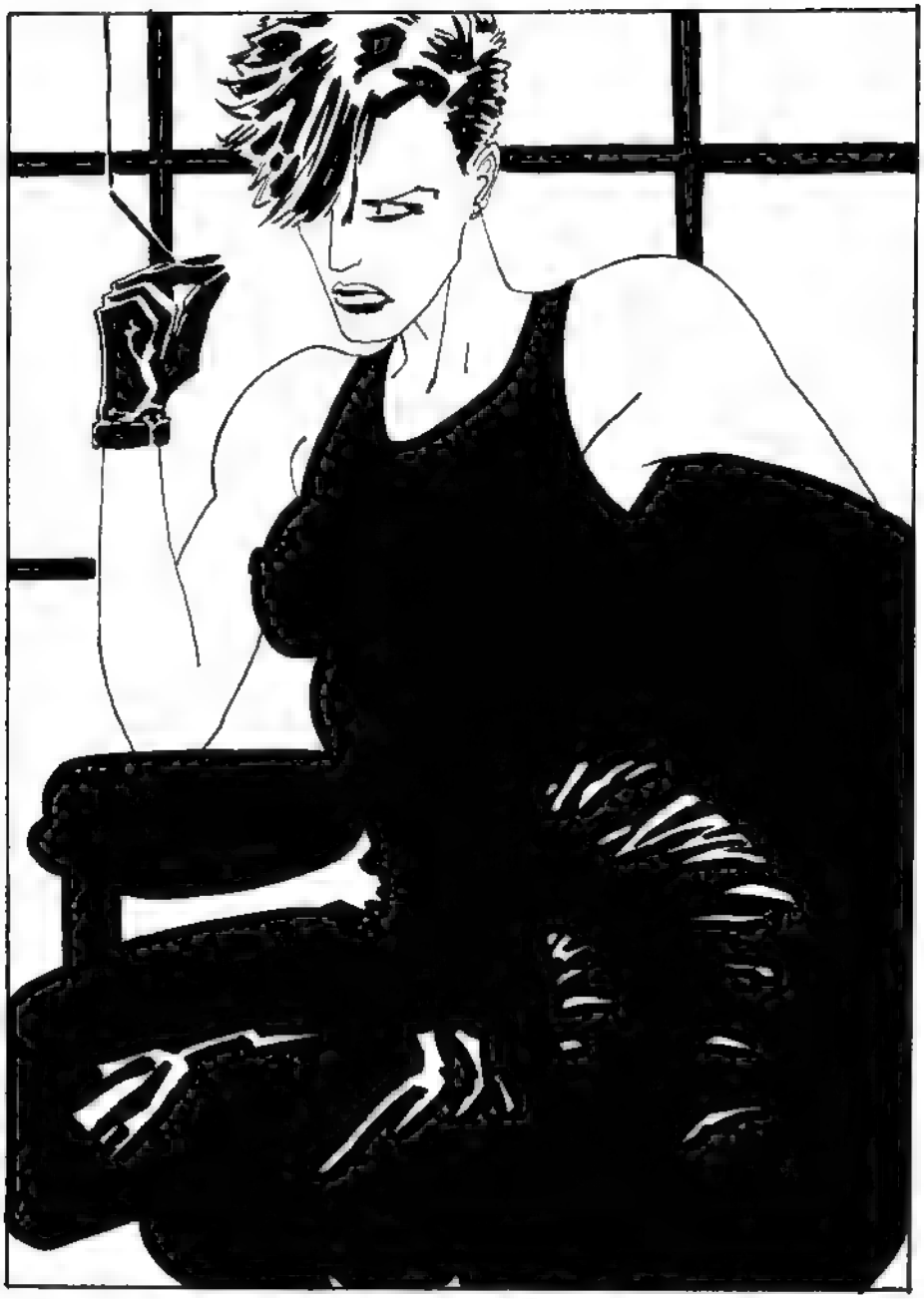
NOT TO CHANGE THE SUBJECT, BUT YOU GOT ANY *DOUGHNUTS* AROUND HERE? EVERYBODY KNOWS ABOUT *COPS* AND *DOUGHNUTS* AND I'D GIVE MY RIGHT NUT FOR A COUPLE OF *CREAM HORNS*.
GET THE MAN SOME CREAM HORNS, BOB
SIR, McCARTHY MUST HAVE HAD *DRINKING BUDDIES*. FAVORITE *JOINTS* HE WENT TO WE'LL NEED A LIST
FIRST *PIZZA* AND NOW IT'S *CREAM HORNS*...
DRINKING BUDDIES? NAH, NOT *DWIGHT!* HE'S A *LONER*--AND THAT'S *ANOTHER* ONE OF HIS PROBLEMS. HE SPENDS TOO MUCH TIME BY *HIMSELF*. IT JUST AIN'T *NATURAL* I TELL YA, I COULD WRITE A BOOK...

MOLLY SAYS YOU'RE READY TO LEAVE.

NO I'M STAYING
WRONG ANSWER
ALL SIX FEET OF GAIL ARE READY TO SPRING INTO ACTION. BUT IT'S NOT THE 45 SHE'S HIDING THAT I'M COUNTING ON.
SHE WOULDN'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST MIHO.

DEADLY LITTLE MIHO
IF SHE RECOGNIZES ME, SHE DOESN'T LET IT SHOW
MISTER, I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE CRAZY OR STUPID OR BOTH, BUT YOU PICKED THE WRONG NEIGHBORHOOD FOR YOUR HIDEOUT. IF GAIL HADN'T RAISED A STINK, YOU'D BE IN THE MORGUE RIGHT NOW.
ALIVE OR DEAD, YOU'RE LEAVING.
I'M STAYING
YOU'LL STONE-WALL THE COPS YOU'LL PROVIDE THE SERVICES OF GAIL, MIHO, AND MOLLY.
WHEN I GIVE AN ORDER, IT WILL BE OBEYED.

I SHOULD FEAR FOR MY LIFE, AND I WOULD--
--IF I COULD JUST GET THAT DAMN "DOUBLEMINT" JINGLE OUT OF MY HEAD.
I DON'T THINK HE CAN FEEL IT, MIHO. GIVE IT A TWIST.
OUR *FINAL OFFER* WE'LL PACK YOU IN A *TRUCK* THAT'LL TAKE YOU ALL THE WAY TO *SEATTLE*--YOU WON'T GIVE WITH ANY MORE *MOUTH* ABOUT *STAY-ING* HERE--
--OR MIHO WILL *EXHALE* AND THAT *HEART* MOLLY WORKED SO HARD TO *FIX* WILL POP LIKE A *GRAPE*
GAIL-- TELL THEM ABOUT *MANUEL*
YES, DWIGHT



GAIL FIRES UP ONE OF HER WEIRD RUSSIAN CIGARETTES. SHE TAKES HER TIME TELLING THE STORY.

SHE TELLS THEM ABOUT MANUEL AND HIS FOUR *BROTHERS*-- ABOUT WHAT THEY DID TO *KELLEY* AND *SANDY* AND *DENISE*.

SHE TELLS THEM ABOUT WHAT I DID TO THAT PACK OF WHITE SLAVERS.

SHE GIVES EVERY DETAIL, HER VOICE FLAT, PRECISE, AS IF SHE WERE IN COURT.

JUST WHEN I THINK SHE'S FINISHED, SHE STAMPS OUT HER CIGARETTE AND FREEZES THE ROOM WITH HER VALKYRIE GLARE. SHE SNAPS OFF EACH WORD LIKE A GUNSHOT:

IF YOU'RE GOING TO KILL HIM, YOU BETTER GO AHEAD AND KILL ME TOO. EVEN THOUGH HE DOESN'T FEEL THE SAME WAY ABOUT ME-- HE'S THE ONLY MAN I'LL EVER LOVE.

THEY ALL SEEM TO BE WAITING FOR THE OTHER SHOE TO DROP
SO I DROP IT.
IT WAS VERY DARK, IN THAT ALLEY, THREE YEARS AGO.
THREE OF THE TONG WHO ATTACKED MIHO WERE DEAD BY HER HAND BUT THE LAST TWO HAD HER DEAD TO RIGHTS POINT-BLANK RANGE.
IT WAS VERY DARK SHE PROBABLY DIDN'T GET A GOOD LOOK AT THE MAN WHO SAVED HER

I GET WHAT I WANT. MORE TIME--
--AND MORE SURGERY

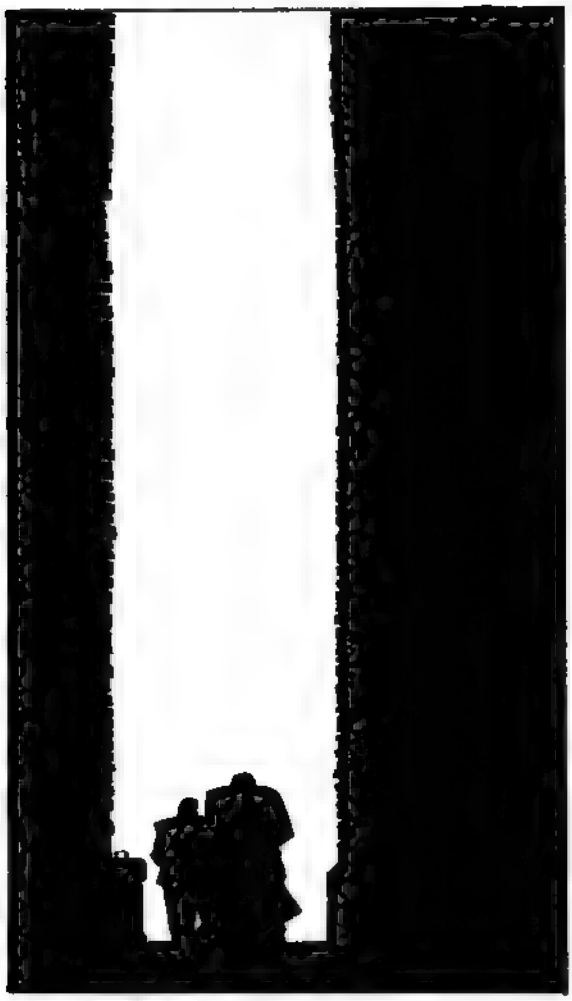
MR. McCARTHY WAS A GOOD TENANT. HE ALWAYS PAID HIS RENT ON TIME. HE WAS QUIET AND POLITE AND HE EVEN FIXED THINGS AROUND THE BUILDING WITHOUT BEING ASKED TO. IF HE'S DONE SOMETHING WRONG, I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT IT COULD BE.
AND YES, BEFORE YOU ASK, I KNOW HE HAD SOME ROUGH TIMES...
...HE TOLD ME ABOUT ALL THAT WHEN HE APPLIED FOR THE LEASE.
HE KEPT TO HIMSELF. HE NEVER HAD ANY GUESTS--UNTIL THAT ONE, HORRIBLE NIGHT. I NEVER SHOULD HAVE LET THAT WOMAN IN. BUT SHE WAS SO *BEAUTIFUL* --AND HE ALWAYS SEEMED SO *LONELY*. AND, WELL, I GUESS YOU CAN CALL ME A ROMANTIC.
WHEN MR. McCARTHY CAME HOME, HE LOOKED LIKE HE'D BEEN IN A FIGHT. HE SAID HE'D BEEN MUGGED AND I DIDN'T SEE ANY REASON TO DOUBT HIS WORD.
HE WENT TO HIS ROOM AND IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE, WELL... THEY MADE A LOT OF NOISE. THEY WERE HAVING QUITE A TIME. MY LORD, HOW THE CEILING SHOOK. HE KEPT SHOUTING HER NAME--*AVA*, I THINK IT WAS. MIND YOU, IF IT HAD BEEN ANY OTHER TENANT, I WOULD HAVE HAD WORDS WITH HIM.
THEN THE SOUNDS TURNED *VIOLENT*. *POUNDING*. *CRASHING*. BREAKING *GLASS*. THE WOMAN *SCREAMED*...

COME ON, MORT! THIS STINKS TO HIGH HEAVEN! SHE WENT TO HIS APARTMENT-- THAT SAME NIGHT!
WE HAVEN'T HEARD AVA'S SIDE OF IT YET, HAVE WE? FOR ALL WE KNOW THE LANDLADY'S IN ON IT WITH McCARTHY.
IN ON WHAT? FIRST THE GUY'S A PSYCHO KILLER--NOW HE'S MASTERMINDING A CONSPIRACY? THERE'S ONLY ONE PERSON WHO HAD ANYTHING TO GAIN FROM DAMIEN LORD GETTING KILLED--
--AND YOU'RE TOO BUSY BANGING THE BROAD TO BRING HER IN FOR QUESTIONING!
YOU DON'T KNOW HER! YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HER! AND I'LL BE DAMNED IF I'LL LET YOU USE THAT KIND OF LANGUAGE WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT HER!
OH, CHRIST. YOU SCHMUCK YOU STUPID SCHMUCK YOU'RE IN LOVE WITH HER.
JESUS, MAN. IT'S ONE THING TO POKE A BABE ON THE SIDE, BUT THIS IS THE WORST. YOU CAN'T EVEN THINK STRAIGHT.
SHUT THE HELL UP! I'M WARNING YOU! JUST SHUT THE HELL UP! I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING!

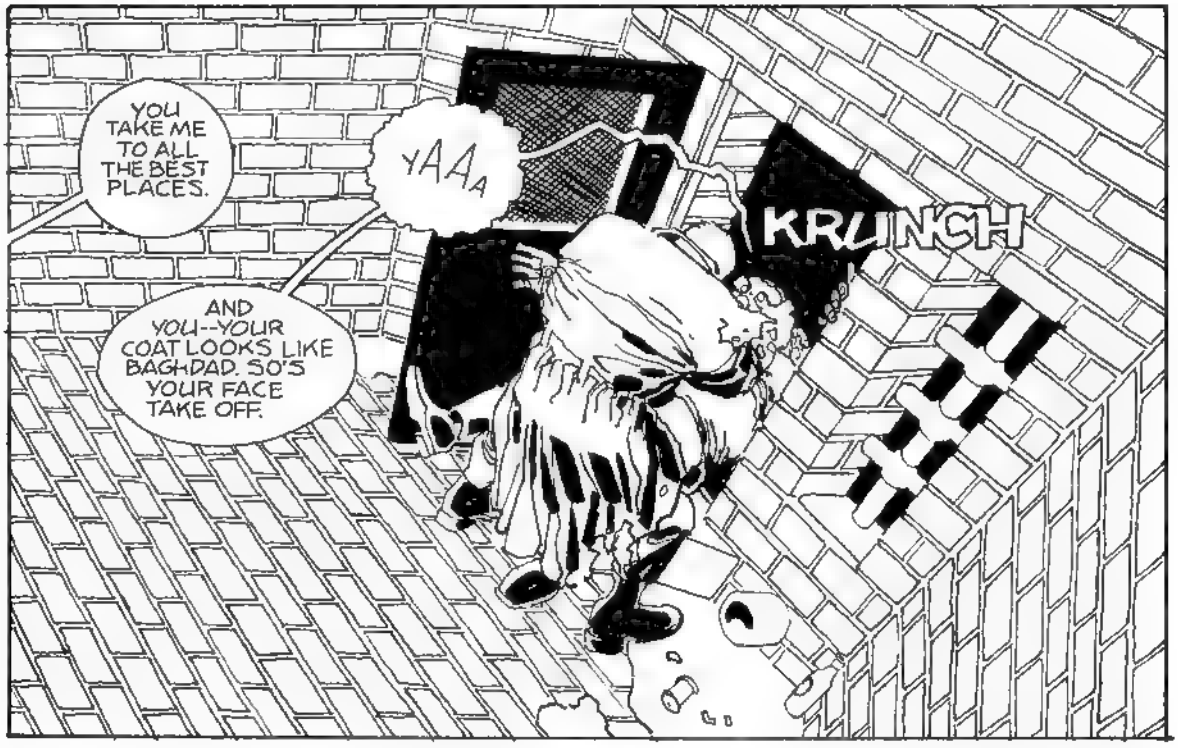
DARLING ...OH, DARLING...
AVA...

...I LIVE FOR THESE MOMENTS, I ONLY WISH-- I KNOW IT'S SELFISH, BUT I WISH YOU COULD STAY ALL NIGHT. JUST ONCE...
...WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG? SOMETHING'S WRONG. I CAN TELL
McCARTHY'S LANDLADY. SHE SAID YOU WENT TO SEE HIM. AT HIS APARTMENT THE NIGHT OF THE MURDER

YES. I WENT TO HIM AND HE RAPED ME AND HE ALMOST KILLED ME.
I THOUGHT I COULD REASON WITH HIM. CALM HIM DOWN. BUT HE WAS WORSE THAN EVER. HE STRUCK ME. HE THREW ME TO THE FLOOR. HE TOOK ME, HIS HANDS AT MY THROAT, STRANGLING ME WHILE HE... THE WHOLE TIME. IF MANUTE HADN'T FOLLOWED ME...
OH, GOD! IT'S ALL MY FAULT! IF I HADN'T GONE THERE--HE MIGHT HAVE STAYED AWAY! AND NOW --NOW NOTHING WILL STOP HIM!
HE'LL KILL ME! EVEN IF YOU CATCH HIM! HE'LL FIND A WAY! HE'LL KILL ME!
NO, AVA. HE'LL NEVER HURT YOU AGAIN BECAUSE I'M GOING TO KILL HIM I SWEAR I WILL



I'LL GIVE YOU CREDIT FOR ONE THING, MORT.


YOU TAKE ME TO ALL THE BEST PLACES.
YAAA
KRUNCH
AND YOU--YOUR COAT LOOKS LIKE BAGHDAD. SO'S YOUR FACE TAKE OFF.

WE'RE POLICE OFFICERS. WE NEED TO SPEAK TO A MEMBER OF YOUR STAFF.
OKAY SURE. WHAT-EVER.
HE'S NEW HERE, MARV. HE DIDN'T KNOW.
THAT'S OKAY, JOSIE. NO BLOOD, NO FOUL.

WE'RE LOOKING FOR A WAITRESS NAMED SHELLIE
SURE, OFFICER GRAB YOURSELF A TABLE AND I'LL SEND HER OVER BUT DON'T GO SHOWING OFF YOUR BADGES-- AND KEEP IN MIND WE'RE PAID UP
I DON'T MEAN IT LIKE I DON'T MEAN IT I DON'T KNOW WHAT GOT INTO ME YOU KNOW I LOVE YOU, DARLING
MORT, IF I SAID ANYTHING BAD ABOUT THIS PLACE, I TAKE IT BACK.
JUST LOOK AT THAT DOLL...

I'M SHELLIE. THIS ISN'T ABOUT THAT STUPID BROTHER OF MINE, IS IT?
NO, MA'AM.
DAMN...
JUST DON'T GO SHOWING OFF YOUR BADGES--AND KEEP IN MIND WE'RE PA.D UP
YES, MA'AM YOU WERE SEEN WITH DWIGHT McCARTHY...

DWIGHT MCCARTHY? WHAT KIND OF MESS HAS THAT JERK GOT HIMSELF INTO?
NO NEVER MIND DON'T TELL ME I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT. I BARELY KNOW THE CREEP--AND WHAT I DO KNOW, I DON'T LIKE. LOUSY TIPPER--NIGHT AFTER NIGHT HE'D JUST SIT THERE, TOSSING THEM BACK AND LOOKING LIKE A LOST PUPPY. AT LEAST HE KEPT TO HIMSELF--UNTIL THAT NIGHT I FELT SORRY FOR HIM AND WE STARTED TALKING
TALKING. THAT, HE WAS GOOD AT FROM ANYBODY ELSE IT WOULD'VE BEEN THE USUAL "SHE DONE ME WRONG," BUT FROM HIM, IT--WELL, IT GOT TO ME, YOU KNOW?
I WAS A SUCKER I TOOK HIM HOME WITH ME. YEAH, IT WAS MY IDEA I'VE HAD BETTER ONES.
ONE THING LED TO ANOTHER AND ONCE HE GOT GOING, HE WAS A WILD ONE, I'LL TELL YOU THAT. IT WAS SOMETHING ELSE--UNTIL THE JERK STARTED CALLING OUT HER NAME, AVA, IT WAS. IT'S EASY TO REMEMBER. HE MUST'VE SAID IT FIFTEEN TIMES. THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN HE STARTED BAWLING AND HE RAN OUT. HE DIDN'T EVEN SAY GOODBYE HE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE THE BALLS TO APOLOGIZE.
SO SIX MONTHS GO BY. SIX MONTHS AND NOT SO MUCH AS A PHONE CALL. THEN IN HE WALKS, HIS FACE ALL PUNCHED IN, JUST STINKING OF BOOZE--BUT IT TURNED OUT HE WAS JUST GETTING STARTED. I SWEAR, EVEN HIM I NEVER SAW HIT THE BOTTLE SO HARD. DRINKING ALONE, JUST LIKE ALWAYS AND HE LEFT ALONE, TOO. WHO'D HAVE THE STOMACH TO GO ANYWHERE WITH HIM WHEN HE'S LIKE THAT?
HE PROBABLY CRAWLED OFF TO OLD TOWN--AND INTO ANOTHER BOTTLE. HE'S GOT FRIENDS IN OLD TOWN, IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.

THUMP
TAKE IT EASY, WEEVIL. I'M HERE TO DO YOU A FAVOR. IT'S MONEY IN YOUR POCKET
HE WAS LAST SEEN IN OLD TOWN...
DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT. IT'S YOUR CAREER... AND YOUR LIFE.
SPREAD THE WORD, WEEVIL. AND GET GOOD CASH FOR IT BECAUSE IT'S WORTH IT.
TELL THEM I'VE BEEN HITTING THE JOINTS, DRUNK OFF MY BUTT, CRYING OVER SOME HOT BABE NAME OF GOLDIE
KRNH
HHUKK
GHAAK
DWIGHT, IT'S SHELLIE. THE COPS WERE JUST HERE. YEAH, I HANDLED IT LIKE YOU TOLD ME TO. YOU TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, WILD MAN
WHAT'LL IT BE, MARV?
A SHOT AND A BREW, SHELLIE. THANKS

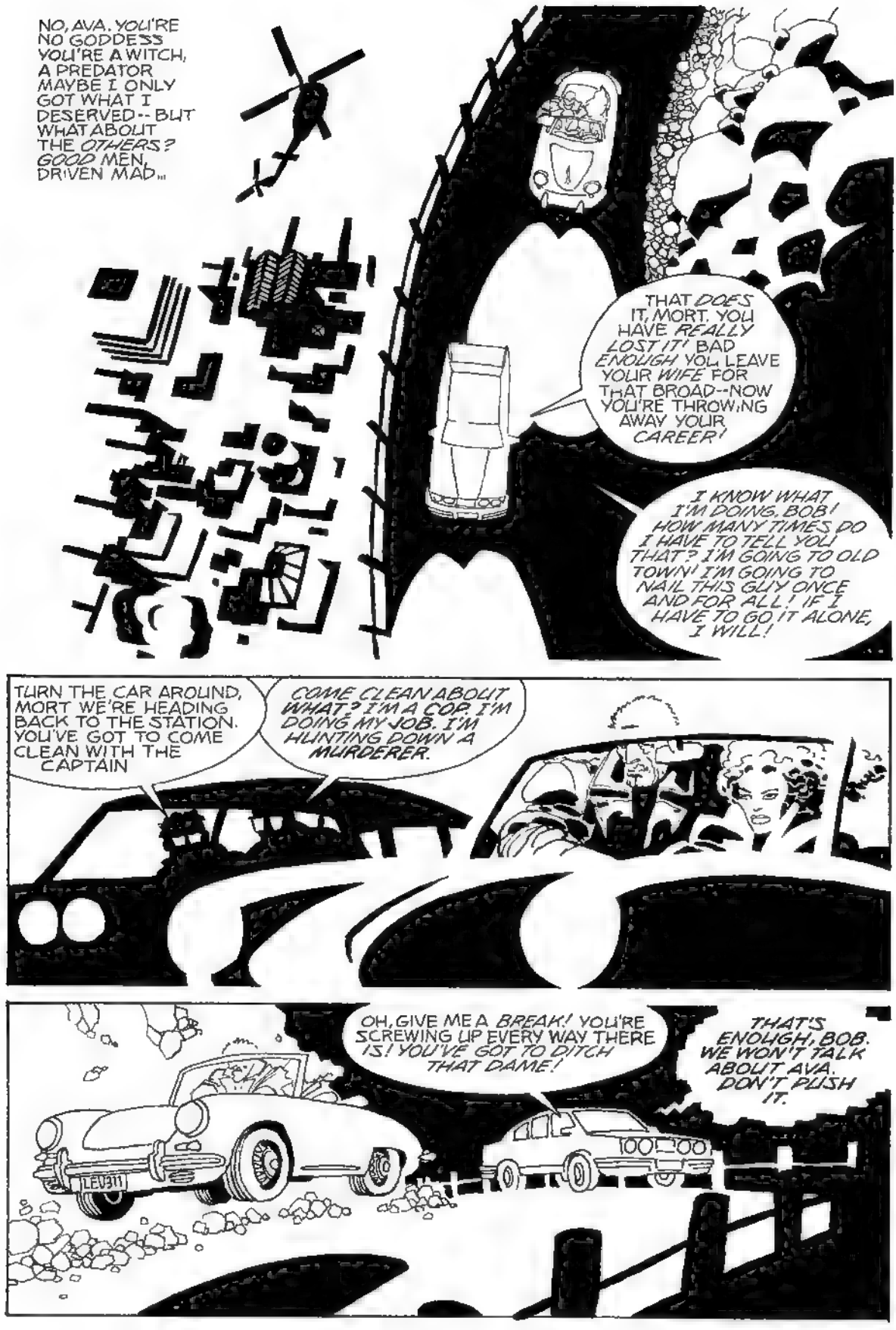
BRINGG!
?
BRINGG!
I'M HEALING QUICKLY, AVA I'LL BE COMING FOR YOU SOON

CHAPTER EIGHT

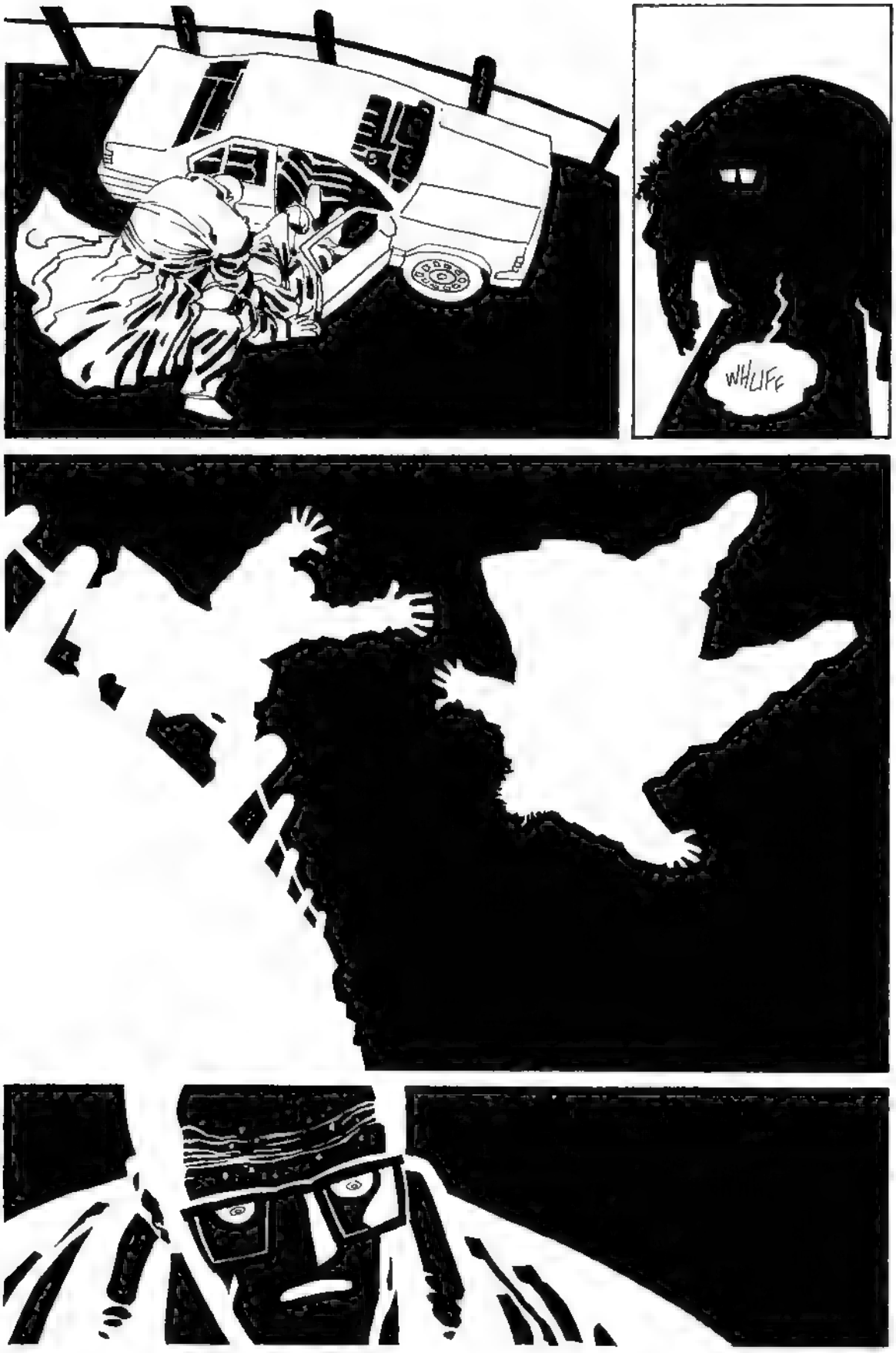
AVA. YOU CAN'T MEAN THIS. NOT AFTER EVERYTHING WE'VE MEANT TO EACH OTHER.
IT'S TEARING MY HEART OUT, MORT! BUT I JUST CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE! DWIGHT IS STILL OUT THERE! HE'S GOING TO KILL ME! AND YOU KNOW WHERE HE IS! AND YOU WON'T DO A DAMN THING ABOUT IT! HOW CAN I TRULY BELIEVE YOU LOVE ME? WE'RE THROUGH, MORT! IT'S OVER!
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE ASKING. WE HAVE TO WAIT FOR HIM TO COME OUT OF OLD TOWN. IT'S THE ONLY WAY.
LISTEN TO YOU! YOU'RE A SIN CITY COP! YOU'VE GOT A BADGE AND A GUN! YOU'VE GOT POWER! USE IT!
IF YOU EVER WANT TO HAVE THIS WOMAN AGAIN--BE A MAN!

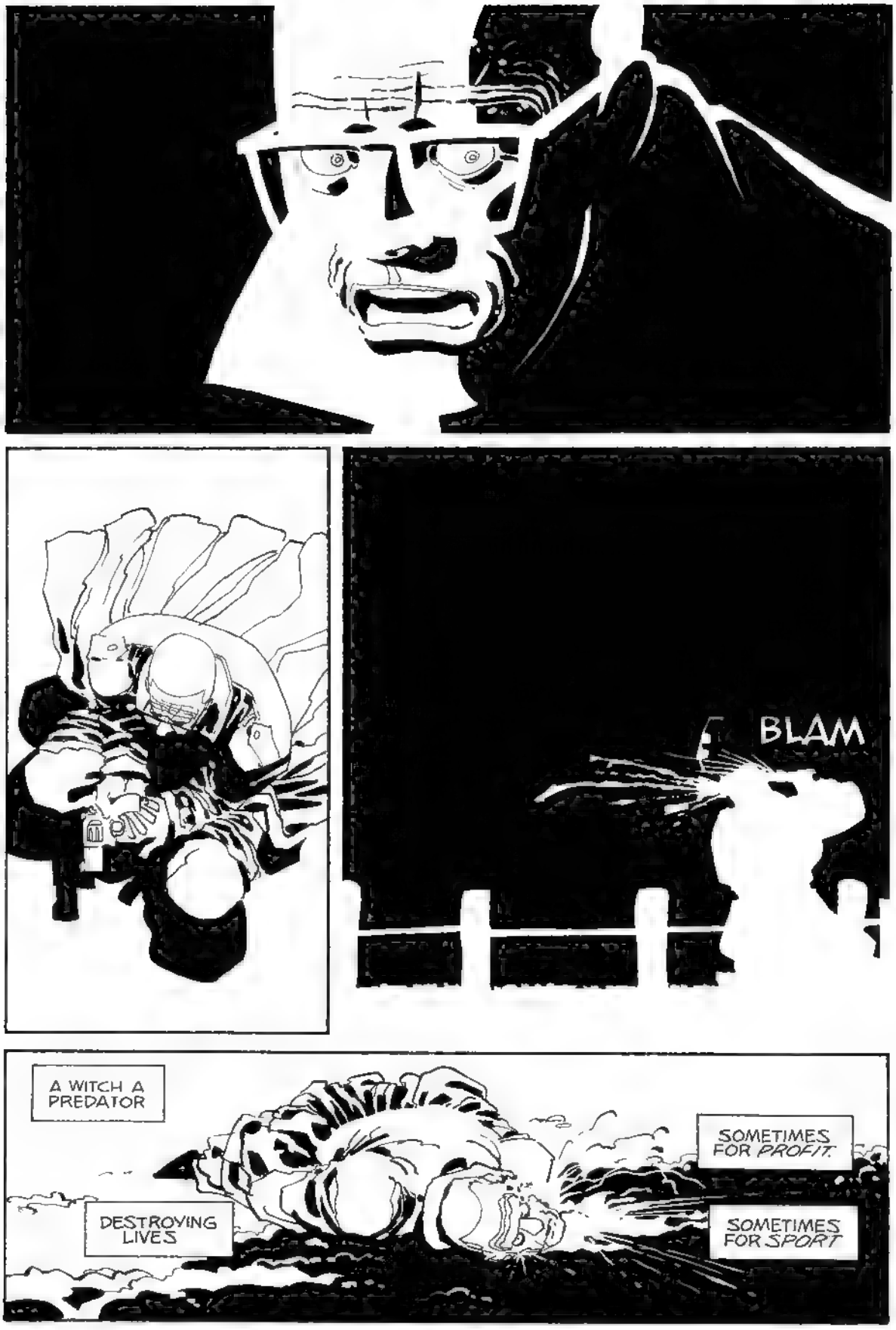
WAKE UP DON'T MOVE.
McCARTHY THE DEATH-- ALREADY, IT'S IN YOUR EYES YOU BREATHE AND THINK AND SPEAK BUT YOUR SOUL IS DEAD THE BODY WILL FOLLOW.
OH, I'M FIT ENOUGH I'M READY TO SETTLE THE SCORE BUT FIRST, THERE'S A COUPLE OF THINGS I'VE GOT TO BE CLEAR ON--ALL THAT TALK ABOUT *TORTURE*, YOU TWO COOKED THAT UP, RIGHT? YOU'RE HER *LOVER*.
FOOL! THE GODDESS TAKES NO *LOVER* THE GODDESS MAKES *SLAVES* OF MEN DAMIEN LORD YOU ME WE SERVE WHEN SHE WISHES, WE DIE IT IS THAT SIMPLE.

"GODDESS"? SPARE ME, WILL YOU? I CAN THINK OF A WHOLE *PILE* OF NAMES TO CALL HER, BUT *GODDESS* ISN'T ONE OF THEM.
NEXT QUESTION HOW MANY *OTHERS*, MANUTE? HOW MANY *MEN* HAS SHE *TRICKED* AND *RUINED* AND *MURDERED*?
DOZENS. IT'S SO EASY FOR HER IN AN *INSTANT*, SHE CAN SEE TO THE *HEART* OF YOU--AND *TRANSFORM* HERSELF INTO YOUR DEEPEST *DESIRE*. TO DAMIEN LORD, SHE WAS A *PRINCESS BRIDE* TO YOU, SHE WAS A *DAMSEL IN DISTRESS*. NONE OF YOU EVER HAD A *CHANCE*.
SHE *DEVOURED* YOU, ALL OF YOU. SOMETIMES FOR *PROFIT*. SOMETIMES FOR *SPORT*. THERE WAS A *PRIEST* SHE DROVE TO *SUICIDE*. THERE WAS AN ARTIST, A *GENIUS*--HIS *MASTERPIECE* WAS A *SCULPTURE* OF AVA. NOW HE WANDERS THE STREETS, INSANE. YOU CANNOT HARM HER, DEAD MAN. YOU CANNOT STOP HER. SHE IS THE GODDESS. SHE CANNOT DIE
YOU'RE AS CRAZY AS SHE IS. IF YOU WERE AS ROTTEN AS HER, I'D BLOW *YOUR* BRAINS *OUT* RIGHT NOW. BUT I'M TRYING TO BE CAREFUL ABOUT WHO I KILL AND ALL *YOU* DID WAS POUND THE CRAP OUT OF ME. *YOU'VE* ALREADY PAID AN EYE FOR THAT SO I'M LETTING YOU OFF WITH A WARNING. STAY IN THAT BED. DON'T GO BACK TO WORK. DON'T GET IN MY WAY.
HIS CHUCKLE IS LIKE ROLLING THUNDER.
HE'S LAUGHING OUT LOUD BY THE TIME I LEAVE


NO, AVA. YOU'RE NO GODDESS YOU'RE A WITCH, A PREDATOR MAYBE I ONLY GOT WHAT I DESERVED -- BUT WHAT ABOUT THE *OTHERS*? *GOOD* MEN, DRIVEN MAD...
THAT *DOES* IT, MORT. YOU HAVE *REALLY* LOST IT! BAD *ENOUGH* YOU LEAVE YOUR *WIFE* FOR THAT BROAD--NOW YOU'RE THROWING AWAY YOUR *CAREER!*
I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING, BOB! HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU THAT? I'M GOING TO OLD TOWN! I'M GOING TO NAIL THIS GUY ONCE AND FOR ALL! IF I HAVE TO GO IT ALONE, I WILL!
TURN THE CAR AROUND, MORT WE'RE HEADING BACK TO THE STATION. YOU'VE GOT TO COME CLEAN WITH THE CAPTAIN
COME CLEAN ABOUT WHAT? I'M A COP. I'M DOING MY JOB. I'M HUNTING DOWN A *MURDERER.*
OH, GIVE ME A *BREAK!* YOU'RE SCREWING UP EVERY WAY THERE IS! YOU'VE GOT TO DITCH THAT DAME!
THAT'S ENOUGH, BOB. WE WON'T TALK ABOUT AVA. DON'T PUSH IT.
LEV311

SOMEBODY'S GOT TO SET YOU STRAIGHT! FORGET THAT STUPID WHORE AND TURN THE CAR AROUND!
SHUT THE HELL UP YOU FAT LITTLE BASTARD! I'M GOING TO OLD TOWN! I'M GOING TO FIND McCARTHY AND KILL HIM BEFORE HE COMES AFTER THE WOMAN I LOVE!
I'M GOING TO DO WHAT I'M GOING TO DO AND IF YOU TRY TO STOP ME YOU'RE MAKING A BIG MISTAKE! A REALLY BIG MISTAKE! I MEAN IT!
SO NOW IT'S THREATS! YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR MIND! TURN THE CAR AROUND OR I'M TURNING YOU IN!
I WARNED YOU! EVERY DAY I WARNED YOU! BUT YOU KEEP ASKING FOR IT AND ASKING FOR IT! WELL HERE IT IS, PAL!
MORT-- NO--
BLAM!
BLAM!

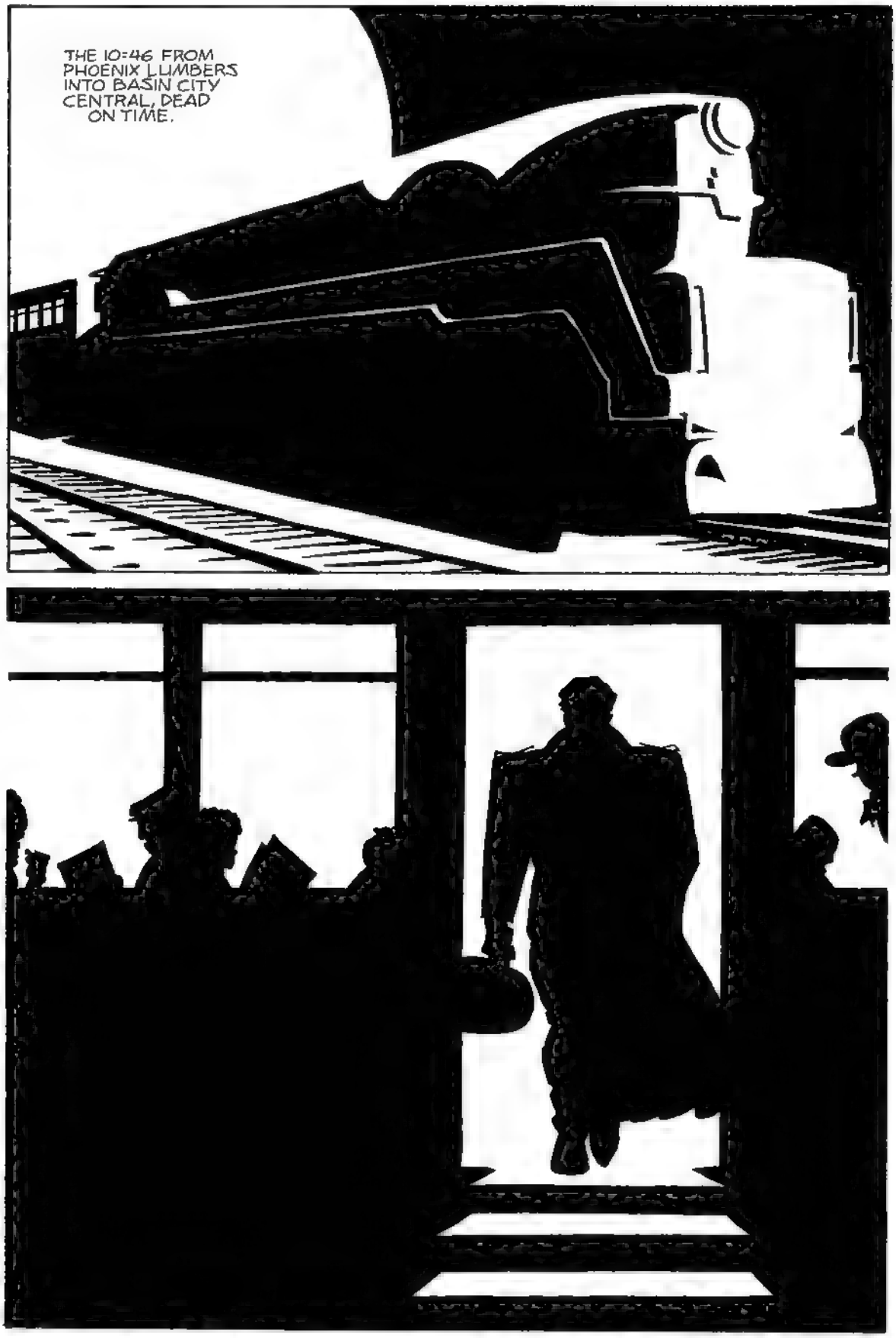

WHLIFE


BLAM
A WITCH A PREDATOR
DESTROYING LIVES
SOMETIMES FOR PROFIT.
SOMETIMES FOR SPORT

BUT NOW YOU'RE LOCKED AWAY IN YOUR *MANSION*, SURROUNDED BY *MEN* AND *GUNS*. A BIRD OF PREY IN A GILDED CAGE
YOU'VE HAD *MONTHS* TO *WAIT* AND *WONDER* AND *WORRY*. IS IT *GETTING* TO YOU YET? ARE YOU READY TO DO SOME THING *STUPID*?
I'M SO HAPPY YOU CHOSE TO ATTEND MY LITTLE PARTY, MR. WALLENQUIST. I'M WELL AWARE YOUR DEALINGS WITH MY HUSBAND WERE LESS THAN *SATISFYING*

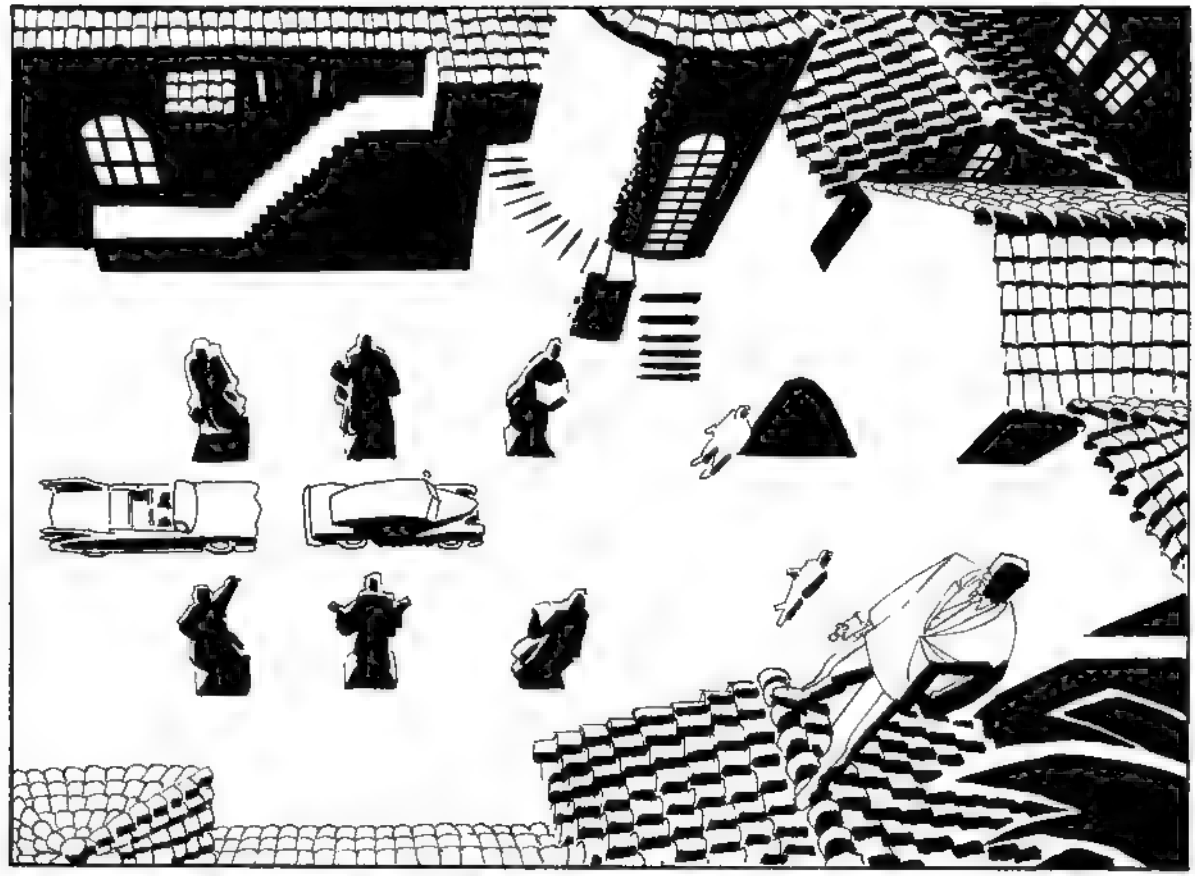
TRUE. I WAS SURPRISED BY YOUR *INVITATION*. I HAD ASSUMED YOU SHARED LORD'S *DISTASTE* FOR MATTERS *EXTRALEGAL*. IT TOOK SEVERAL *PHONE CALLS* TO DETERMINE *WHY* YOU SOUGHT MY ATTENTION
I'M FLATTERED THAT A MAN LIKE YOU WOULD SHOW SUCH *INTEREST*

I'LL WARN YOU ONCE AND ONCE ONLY MRS LORD--DO NOT FLIRT WITH ME. I HAVE NO USE FOR YOUR CHARMS
YOU'RE AN AMATEUR IN A GAME BEST LEFT TO PROFESSIONALS YOU'VE ENJOYED AN AMATEUR'S LUCK. BUT THE TWO POLICEMEN--THAT WAS AN EMBARRASSING BLUNDER. YOU NEED THIS CASE SETTLED. YOU NEED DWIGHT McCARTHY'S CORPSE AND A SUICIDE NOTE IN WHICH HE CONFESSES TO THE MURDER OF DAMIEN LORD
I WILL PROVIDE THESE THINGS MY PRICE FOR DOING SO WILL BE FAR HIGHER THAN THE RATHER OBVIOUS ONE YOU SEEM SO FOND OF PAYING
AS OF NOW, OUR CORPORATIONS ARE IN PARTNERSHIP
MY AGENT WILL ARRIVE TOMORROW NIGHT FROM PHOENIX. BY TRAIN.


THE 10:46 FROM PHOENIX LUMBERS INTO BASIN CITY CENTRAL, DEAD ON TIME.

GOOD EVENING, SIR. WE HAVE A CAR WAITING I'LL TAKE YOUR BAG.
WRONG BOTH TIMES, BUDDY NOBODY TOUCHES MY GEAR -- AND I GOT SOMEBODY PICKING ME UP WHO'S ONE HELL OF A LOT CUTER THAN YOU
IT WAS OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT YOU WOULD BE ALONE.
LIVE WITH IT, BIG GUY. I'M FULL OF SURPRISES.

EDDIE!
SHAKE YOUR WAY OVER TO THE SHOTGUN SIDE, DOLL. I'M DRIVING.
CAN WE GO DANCING, EDDIE? I FEEL CRAZY TONIGHT I CAN'T SETTLE DOWN
SURE, BABY. DANCING, TABLES, THE WORKS. YOU DON'T VISIT SIN CITY TO READ THE BIBLE. BUT FIRST I GOT ME A MEETING TO DO. IT WON'T TAKE A HALF-HOUR.
DHV
DHV
DO YOU THINK HE SUSPECTS?
NO WAY OF KNOWING.



HURRY BACK, EDDIE YOU KNOW I GET *IMPATIENT*-- AND YOU KNOW I GET A LITTLE *CRAZY* WHEN I GET *IMPATIENT*
AND YOU KNOW I GET JEALOUS. DON'T BE STUPID REMEMBER PHILLY.
KEEP AN EYE ON THE WOMAN, BOOGAARD.
YES, SIR!

I FIGURE WE GOT US A GOOD TWENTY MINUTES ON OUR HANDS WITH NOTHING TO DO. I HATE JUST SITTING STILL, DON'T YOU?
SOMETIMES EDDIE ISN'T FAIR AT ALL. LIKE RIGHT NOW, TO TAKE A FOR INSTANCE. HE SHOULDN'T HAVE LEFT ME ALL ALONE WITH A GUY LIKE YOU. YOU'RE SO TALL. I LIKE TALL GUYS. THEY MAKE ME WANT TO DO ALL KINDS OF CRAZY THINGS. BUT YOU AND ME, IF WE WAS TO GO AND DO SOMETHING WE SHOULDN'T, EDDIE, HE'D KILL BOTH OF US IF HE WAS TO FIND OUT. LAST TIME HE HURT ME REALLY BAD
SO HE BETTER NOT FIND OUT. THAT'S IF WE DO SOMETHING WE SHOULDN'T
MY LIPS ARE SEALED

KRAKK

MRS LORD IS BATHING SHE WILL BE READY TO ENTERTAIN YOU MOMENTARILY.
JACOBY. KILL THIS MAN IF HE MOVES.
YES, SIR.
WHAT IS THIS CRAP?
MY COMPLIMENTS TO YOUR SURGEON, MR McCARTHY A REMARKABLE TRANSFORMATION BUT YOU STILL HAVE THE EYES. THE EYES OF A DEAD MAN.
JUST LIKE THAT, EVERY-THING GOES RIGHT STRAIGHT TO HELL
IF THEY STRIP-SEARCH ME, I'M FINISHED.

THUNK
GYAAA!
KUKK

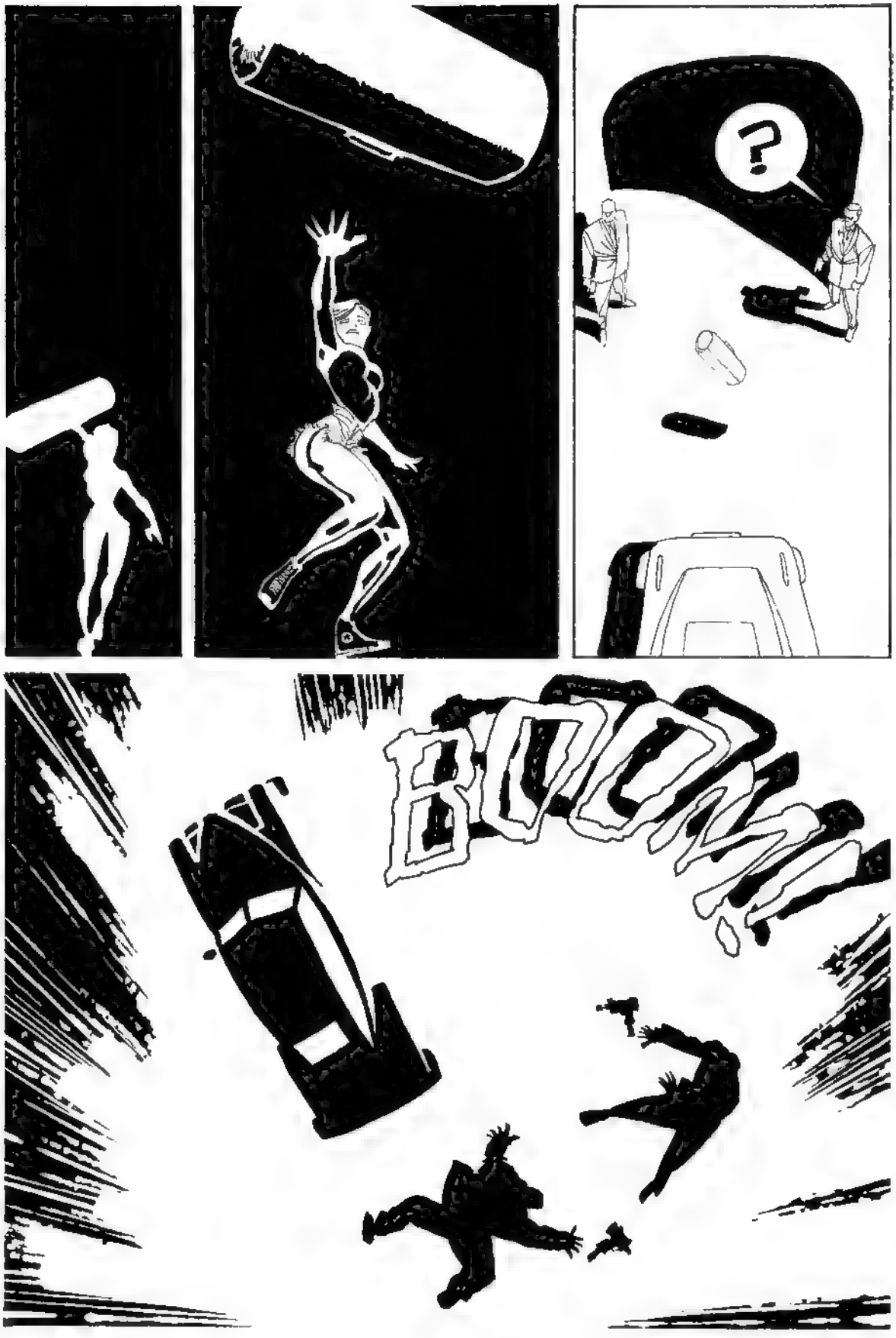
BATHING. I SHOULD'VE KNOWN SHE'D BE BATHING.
I USED TO KID HER, ABOUT ALL HER SWIMMING AND BATHING I SAID SHE WAS PART FISH MY LITTLE MERMAID
THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO BACK WHEN WE WERE LOVERS.
A LONG TIME AGO

AVA
DAMN

SHE FINALLY COMES UP FOR AIR. MANUTE TELLS HER WHO I AM

PLANT

DWIGHT... IT'S *TRUE* IT'S *YOU*. AMAZING YOU WENT TO ALL THIS TROUBLE-- OVER *ME*?
WHATEVER DID YOU DO WITH THE MAN WHO WAS *SUPPOSED* TO BE ON THAT TRAIN?
LET'S JUST SAY HE NEVER LEFT PHOENIX
SHE KEEPS TALKING BUT I CAN'T HEAR IT PAST THE POUND-IN MY EARS. MY JAW'S SO TIGHT IT FEELS LIKE IT'S GOING TO POP FROM MY SKULL. MY BACK IS IN KNOTS. I'VE BEEN *MADE* AND I'VE DRAGGED MIHO AND GAIL INTO THIS WITH ME
NO. DON'T THINK THAT WAY. BREATHE. STEADY. RELAX INTO IT. IF YOU GET THE OPENING YOU'RE COUNTING ON, BE READY FOR IT.
STEAM STILL RISES FROM HER SKIN
EVERYTHING SHE'S DONE AND I STILL CAN'T TAKE MY EYES OFF HER
EVERYTHING SHE'S DONE OVER ALL THE YEARS. ALL THE LIES AND TEARS AND BLOOD AND DEATH AND STILL I CAN'T TAKE MY EYES OFF HER.
AND DOESN'T SHE KNOW IT SHE SMILES AND STRUTS, SHOWING IT OFF, TURNING EVERY MAGNIFICENT INCH OF HERSELF IN THE LIGHT
THINK. CONCENTRATE. FEEL THE WEIGHT OF THE COLD THING NESTLED IN YOUR SLEEVE, STRAPPED TO YOUR LEFT ARM.
RELAX. THINK. CONCENTRATE
REMEMBER WHAT SHE DID. REMEMBER WHAT SHE IS. LET HER TALK. WAIT FOR YOUR OPENING
WAIT FOR GAIL TO DO HER BIT...


?
BOOM!

ALARMS GO OFF ALL OVER THE PLACE MEN SHOUT MACHINE PISTOLS RATTLE AT RANDOM. ALL HELL IS BREAKING LOOSE OUT THERE. THE GIRLS HAVE GIVEN ME ONE CLEAR CHANCE.

IT'S JUST A CRUMMY LITTLE 25. THAT'S ALL I COULD FIT UP MY SLEEVE.

POW!!
POW!!
POW!!
STUPID SIX SHOTS-- AND NOT A SINGLE HEAD WOUND...
KHOF

BLAM!

YRA

SHE'S PANTING, SOBBING
HER EYES ARE WET AND FULL OF LOVE
BEHIND ME --A GROWL. HE'LL BE ON ME IN SECONDS.
THIS'LL BE TRICKY.
THEN IT ALL GETS DOWN TO SPEED AND LUCK.
DWIGHT! GET DOWN!

GODDESS
GYARR
I GUESS SHE FIGURED I WAS THE WINNING HORSE
HURGG
IT'S A LITTLE *LATE* IN THE *RACE* TO CHANGE YOUR *BET*, AVA.
HEFF

HNH?
DEADLY LITTLE MIHO
A FALLING LEAF WOULD MAKE MORE NOISE.

KILL HIM. TELL HER TO KILL HIM. IT'S THE ONLY WAY. IT WAS HIM. ALL ALONG. TELL HER TO CHOP HIS GOD DAMNED HEAD OFF! IT WAS HIM! HE'S NOT HUMAN! HE CONTROLLED MY MIND!
STOP IT, AVA NO MORE LIES. IT'S OVER.

IT'S NOT A LIE! NOT THIS TIME! OH, DWIGHT --I CAN'T BLAME YOU IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME, BUT I BEG YOU TO HEAR ME OUT IT WOULD BE SUCH A CRUEL IRONY IF THINGS ENDED THIS WAY
IT ALL BEGAN THREE YEARS AGO...
SHE GOES ON I DON'T LOOK INTO HER EYES THAT HELPS A LITTLE BIT.
...MANUTE USED ANCIENT TECHNIQUES--ANCIENT MYSTICISM. HE CRAWLED INSIDE OUR MINDS HE TOOK CONTROL OF DAMIEN'S EMPIRE...OH, GOD, IT'S SUCH A BLUR ...DAMIEN BEGAN TO FIGHT HIM HE WAS GOING TO EXPOSE MANUTE AS THE MONSTER HE IS SO MANUTE USED ME. I TRIED TO FIGHT, BUT I WAS WEAK, SO WEAK...
THEN SHE PULLS CLOSE AND I'VE GOT TO LOOK AND ALL I WANT IS TO BE LOST IN THE SIGHT AND SOUND AND SMELL OF HER...
MY LOVE --IT WOULD BE HIS FINAL TRIUMPH IF WE LOST EACH OTHER NOW. I'M FREE. FREE OF DAMIEN. FREE OF MANUTE WE CAN BE HAPPY. TOGETHER. FOREVER
HER KISS IS A PROMISE OF PARADISE

THE GUN BARKS AND BUCKS IN MY HAND. LIFE LEAVES AVA WITH A SIGH.
SIRENS CLIMB THE HILL. DOWN IN THE COURTYARD GAIL HONKS THE HORN, IMPATIENT.
WE'LL TAKE THE BACK ROADS, THE OLD BOOTLEGGER ROADS.
THEY'LL NEVER CATCH US.
THE END

For Cyclone

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